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*The* LITTLE  
KING OF  
ANGEL'S  
LANDING

ELMORE ELLIOTT PEAKE

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for, American.

NBO  
P. 100



*Grace Mackenzie Miller.*

***The* LITTLE KING *of*  
ANGEL'S LANDING**



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“‘Tell me how I was blown up on the steamboat, grandpa.’”

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*The* LITTLE KING *of*  
ANGEL'S LANDING

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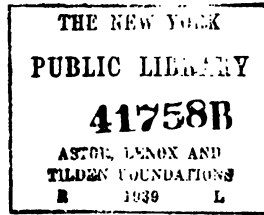
*By*  
ELMORE ELLIOTT PEAKE  
AUTHOR OF "THE HOUSE OF HAWLEY"



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1906



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*Published September, 1906*

TO  
MY SISTER PEARNE  
WHOM LITTLE ABE KNEW AND  
LOVED WELL

WDR 19 FEB 30



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# THE LITTLE KING OF ANGEL'S LANDING

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## I

THE hamlet of Angel's Landing occupies a long, narrow strip at the foot of a rock-faced bluff on the Illinois shore of the Ohio River. This noble stream here flows due south in a straight two-mile reach, which it approaches by a majestic sweep from the east, and leaves by another majestic sweep back to the east, forming what is known to rivermen as a horseshoe bend—a very trying conformation in high water for boats with heavy tows. In the spring, when great fields of barges passed by Angel's, one on the heels of another, unceasingly, all day and all night, for weeks at a time, until it seemed as if the bowels of the earth must have been depleted of their coal, the weary, grimy towboats would grapple anew their unwieldy loads at this point, and, puffing hoarsely, reverse their big stern



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wheels, and patiently work their way around the difficult double turn.

The Landing boasts only two streets—"Front" and "Back" are their homely names—but what is lost in breadth is gained in length. Most of the houses respectfully face the river, as though confessing that to this divinity they owe their existence. From the group of little stores on Front Street a gravelled declivity leads down to the river and the mossy, water-logged wharf.

A humble structure is the latter; but what the Forum was to Rome, or the tavern to a colonial village, this wharf is to Angel's Landing. It is the heart through which the blood of the hamlet flows. For the greater part of the day it basks, silent and deserted, in the sun, with the pitch bubbling from its seams, and the catfish nosing along its slimy water line. But let a steamboat whistle and all is changed! Sleeping figures in unsuspected nooks yawn, stretch, and arise; drays rattle down the bank; the postmaster seizes his leathern pouch; loafers quicken their pace, and for a little while all is life and animation.

The wharf may be described as a warehouse



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built upon the hulk of a steamboat which ended its active career, some twenty years before, by blowing up a mile above the Landing. It is moored to great posts on the shore, so that it may rise and fall as the capricious Ohio rises and falls; and in times of extreme high water, when the graveled declivity gradually disappears beneath an ugly yellow tide, it rubs elbows with the store fronts, enabling the merchants to transfer their goods from the packets to their shelves without the intervention of a dray.

It may be unnecessary to add that this is a convenience which the merchants are quite willing to forego, for "high water" is a dreaded phrase in the hamlet. It means flooded homes, ruined gardens, drowned cattle, no church, no pleasure, no business; and, when a stage is reached which forces the steamboats to tie up, it also means isolation from the world.

One afternoon in early summer a party of small boys not yet in their teens, were scaling the steep foot-path which leads from the village to a farm-house on the brow of the bluff. One of the youngest of the group, a

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little cripple on crutches, had fallen behind the others.

"Wait for Abe!" shouted a boy, looking back from his coign of vantage above.

"You needn't wait for me!" instantly retorted the crippled child between gasps, while a red spot burned in each sallow cheek as a result of his profound exertions. "I'm a-comin' as fast as—as fast as I care to. I ain't in no—in no hurry myself."

Then, with a pride quite unexpected in such a humble atom of humanity, he gripped his crutches until his knuckles showed white, set his teeth, and managed to take up a part of the gap between his companions and himself.

"Are you sure your grandpaw ain't home, Abe?" asked one of the larger boys cautiously, after the squad had reached the top and were filing through the farmhouse gate, as unconscious as the butterflies in the petunia-bed of the magnificent display below them of river, forest, and fields.

"If I wasn't sure I wouldn't have said so," answered Abe curtly, as he led the way to the front door.

"Gee whillikens, Abe, you goin' in the

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front way?" ventured another doubtful lad, lagging behind. "I bet Mrs. Derricks won't like it."

"Mrs. Derricks don't run this house," answered Abe conclusively. "My grandpa and me run it."

As the dusty, barefooted troop softly and somewhat stealthily entered the solemn, darkened front room, they half involuntarily removed their hats and peered about in the twilight with awed faces.

"I been promisin' you boys to show you these here pictures a long time," began Abe impressively, from his commanding position in the center. "But before I tell you about 'em, I want you to solemnly swear—cross your heart and hope you may die—that you'll never breathe a word of it, not even to your wives when you git married."

"Why, is they anything wicked about 'em, like murders?" faltered one youth.

"*Is there!*" repeated Abe darkly. "Do you suppose I brung you up here to show you a lot of Sunday-school teachers?"

After this the troop all subscribed to the oath of secrecy without further parley, and

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Abe turned to the waiting pictures. They were merely a series of abominably executed crayon portraits, such as may be found in thousands of American homes—though they are now being relegated to the garret—and certainly promised little in the way of mystery and crime.

“That’s my great-great-great-grandfather, and he was a pirate,” began Abe, pointing to a pious-looking old farmer with chin whiskers.

He paused an instant, took breath, and then with a facility acquired by numberless rehearsals of the story for his own amusement, on rainy Sundays, he continued:

“He sailed the seas from the time he was ten years old. He owned an island all by himself, and it was full of buried gold and diamonds that he had captured—a hundred ships’ full. He killed over a thousand people—made ’em walk the plank and jump into the sea without no life preserver on. But only rich people. If they was poor, he just filled their pockets with gold and let ’em go.”

“By jeeminy!” murmured one of the listeners under his breath. “I wish he’d a-caught me and knowed I was poor.”

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"How long ago did he live, Abe?" asked another.

"About a thousand years, I reckon," answered Abe at a venture, having never given this point any study.

"This is my great-great-great-grandmother," he continued, pointing to an old lady of the '40's in cap and curls. "She was a princess oncet—the daughter of a king, you know—and she lived in a palace that had a hundred thousand winders in it, and every one of 'em with a lace curtain."

He paused to let this tremendous fact soak into his hearers' consciousness.

"I'll bet she didn't wash 'em all herself!" whispered one of the boys, in the lull.

"She never washed any of 'em or done any work at all, not even to wash her own hands and face," said Abe grandly. "Hired girls done it fur her. And she had all the money and carriages and horses she wanted. But one day my grandfather come along in his ship and caught her and carried her off. He was just jokin', because he was always good to women; but when he started to take her back to her palace, she didn't want to go back

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—he had been so good to her. So he married her, and gave her all the diamond rings she could wear on both hands, and let her steer the ship whenever she wanted to.”

“Not in a storm?” queried a doubting Thomas, gazing with awed eyes up at the placid old lady.

“Yes, in the worst storm that ever blowed,” answered Abe promptly. “And she could see as well at night as in the day time, just like horses and cats. But after she married grandfather she never let him kill no more people.”

Thus he passed from one picture to another, waxing in enthusiasm as he went, and weaving lurider and lurider romances until even his own spine began to be afflicted with creepy sensations. Then, with characteristic capriciousness, he abruptly cut his recital short and led the urchins forth into the welcome sunshine once more.

“By jeeminy crickets, I’m glad I ain’t a pirate, killin’ people by the thousand, and carryin’ off women, and breakin’ their parents’ hearts!” exclaimed Willie Timmins, with a deep breath of relief.

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"You couldn't be one if you wanted to," said Abe haughtily. "You don't know enough about a ship."

"Now tell us about the time you was blown up on the steamboat, Abe," begged Red Maginnis.

Red was Abe's best friend, but this time the spellbinder shook his head. "I don't want to tell no more stories to-day, Red."

He sat on the shady steps, with his crutches across his shrunken little legs, until the last halloo of the boys had died away below. He was scarcely conscious of having lied to them; indeed, he had the reputation of being an exceptionally candid child. The truth was, his piratical ancestor and that gentleman's royal wife, together with a host of other creations of his vivid imagination, were more or less real to him; and he had repeated their fictitious history to himself until he had come to believe it.



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### II

As Aaron Hathaway—a man past middle age, but still as rugged as an oak—sat on the porch some hours later and smoked his evening pipe in the soft summer air, tempered by exhalations from the river below, Abe drew up a chair for himself.

“Tell me how I was blowed up on the steamboat, grandpa,” said he.

“You’re too nervous for that story to-night, Abie,” answered Hathaway gently, taking a whiff and eyeing the child reflectively. Had he known of the gathering in the parlor, he could have laid his finger on the source of Abe’s nervousness.

“No, I ain’t,” pleaded Abe. “I’m nervous, but I ain’t *too* nervous. Please tell it.”

The fond old grandfather weakly yielded, and for the thousandth time, perhaps, he began the story.

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“ Well, I was once settin' here, about eight years ago, one summer night, just about as I am now, only a little later in the evening, smokin' my pipe, when the *Flora MacDonald* come around the upper bend. Her lights was a-twinklin' like a floating city. I remember that I thought she had never looked prettier, and——”

“ You knew it was the *Flora MacDonald* by her whistlin' for Belle View, three miles above,” interposed Abe.

“ Yes, I forgot that—I knew it was the *Flora MacDonald* by her whistlin' for Belle View, three miles above. I remember she never looked prettier to me, as she plowed down the center of the river as straight as an arrow, with a few sparks flying out of her stacks. The darkies were singing down on the forecastle, and some one was playing the piano in the saloon upstairs. I could hear it so plain in the quiet of the night.

“ Well, just as she got opposite the landing, she blew a long blast for the right of -way around the lower bend. She had the sweetest whistle of any boat on the river, and it was

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always music to my ears. I could hear it echo clear back to the upper bend. Then the next instant she seemed to jump right out of the water. Her lights shot in a thousand directions——”

“Like skyrockets!”

“—like skyrockets, and then there came a tremendous explosion that shook every window in this house and stopped the kitchen clock. Below, where a minute before there had been music and lights, all was dark—dark and still. I couldn’t hear a sound—not a moan, not a single cry for help. I remember just how softly the breeze blew through that rock maple there while I was strainin’ my ears to hear something, and how the crickets chirped in the grass, just as if nothing had ever broken the peace of earth. I begun to think the trouble was with me—that I’d had a stroke of some kind. Then the fire-bell in the village began to clang, and I knew that I had witnessed a great horror.”

The boy shifted his narrow little body from one side of the big rustic chair to the other, so as to get closer to the story-teller, reached for one of his grandfather’s hands, and lis-

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tened as breathlessly as if he were hearing the tale for the first time.

"I run down to the landing without hat or coat, and how I done it without breaking my neck on that steep path, in the pitch dark, nobody but the Lord knows. The whole town was down by the river's edge by the time I got there, and every boat to be had was already out picking up the survivors and what dead bodies they could find. All I could do was wait, and it wasn't pleasant work, I can tell you. Pretty soon they began to bring 'em in—some dead, some scalded until they were worse'n dead, some with an arm or a leg blowed off, and some not hurt at all."

"One man with both legs blowed off and a cigar still in his mouth," prompted the child. His eyes glistened, and his fingers twitched nervously.

"Yes—only I didn't intend to tell you that part to-night," answered the grandfather. "And I won't tell it all, because I see you *are* too nervous, in spite of what you said. But I'll tell your part. Well, out of one hundred and eighty on board, countin' the crew, ac-

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cordin' to the purser, only thirty-three was saved. At first we thought it was only thirty-two, but as I was comin' back home, along toward morning, with the groans of the men and the screams of the women still ringing in my ears——”

“Go slow now!” cautioned the lad eagerly.

“—as I was coming home, along the river bank, I heard a peculiar sound in a little clump of willows. At first I thought it must be a coon, but thinking that was a queer place for a coon, I stepped over to the bush and shook it a little. Nothing run, but that same sound came out again. It sounded like—I won't tell you what it sounded like—but I spread the willows, bent down close, and peeped in. What do you suppose I saw, Abe?”

“*A baby!*” cried the boy instantly.

“Yes, a baby—a poor little baby all burnt with steam and every bone in its body broken, it seemed to me when I picked it up. And yet it was just crying softlike to itself, as if nothing much had happened, and all it wanted was its mammy and a little dinner. That baby was you, Abe, and it had been blown from

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that steamboat to those willows, a distance of over a hundred yards. And still it lived!

"I took it back to the Landing. A lot of doctors from Brazil and Boone's Ferry and other places had arrived about midnight, and they were still very busy with the wounded. But as soon as I could get hold of one I had him take a look at you. At first, when I told him where I'd found you, and that you had been lying in those bushes for over seven hours, I seen he thought the horrors of the night had made me crazy. But he felt your arms and legs over, and then shook his head and said: 'The child is practically dead now.'

"He was so cold-blooded about it that it made me mad, and I said: 'Doctor, if you would take a second look I think you'd change your mind.' With that I carried you off up here. After Mrs. Derricks and me had kept you alive for three days, the doctors admitted that you might live, and in a month you were all right. That is, Abie, as all right as you ever will be," he added tenderly. Then, as if regretting the words, he subjoined quickly: "But I knew from the first you would live.

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You were such a game little fellow. You didn't cry hardly at all."

Abe flushed with pride.

"Now tell me how you come to name me Abraham."

"That won't take long. I thought at first of calling you Moses, because I found you in the bulrushes, so to speak, by the water's edge. Besides, my own father's name was Moses. Then, happening to think that there was a letter "A" on the little locket you wore when we found you, I commenced to study all the names that begun with A, thinkin' I might possibly hit your real one. Naturally, Abraham, the father of the Israelites, come to mind first. But it being a pretty heavy-sounding name for such a little fellow as you, I was about to pass it by until it occurred to me that I couldn't do better than start you out in life with the name of the greatest man Illinois ever produced. So I christened you Abraham Lincoln Hathaway."

"But that ain't my real name, is it?"

"It's your real name *now*."

"But it ain't the name my father and mother give me," the boy persisted.

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"No—not likely."

"What do you suppose that name was, grandpa?" queried the boy tremulously.

"I have no idea, child," answered Hathaway gently.

"Do you suppose it was Andrew?"

"It might have been. I don't suppose we'll ever know now. I done everything I could to find out who you were. There was several babies on the boat. You was the only one that was saved, and none of the survivors could identify you. I put advertisements in the Cincinnati and Cairo papers. The steamboat company done the same in Pittsburg papers, hoping to attract some of your relatives. But we never heard a word."

"Then my father and mother was blowed up and died," said the child thickly.

"It's most likely they was, Abie." It was all old ground, but Hathaway had to go over it each time he told the story.

The boy suddenly began to sob. The old man, with sorrowful face, quietly laid down his pipe and lifted Abe across to his lap.

"I was afraid you was too nervous to-night, sonny," he said self-reproachfully, as he



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pressed the boy's head to his shoulder and stroked his hair.

Mrs. Derricks, the housekeeper, having finished the supper dishes, came out on the porch at this juncture and sat down. She glanced critically at the pair but said nothing. She knew just as well what had occurred as if she had been present, but she had long since learned that to advise Aaron Hathaway was to waste her breath.

Presently the little flat breast of the cripple ceased its heaving, and, pulling his grandfather's head down, Abe whispered something in his ear.

"Mrs. Derricks, he would like to have you go in the house for a minute while he asks me something," said Hathaway, in a matter-of-fact tone.

The woman arose without a word, but showing no impatience or resentment, and disappeared within.

"Grandpa, do you suppose my father could have been a king?" asked Abe, in a voice still unsteady.

"Tain't likely, Abe. Kings ain't so thick nowadays as they once was."

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"But this was a long time ago—when I was a baby."

"Yes. But they wasn't as thick even then as they used to be."

"If he *was* a king, and didn't happen to be blowed up on the *Flora MacDonald*, and ever come for me to live in his palace, would you let me go?"

"Would you want to go?" asked the old man wistfully.

The boy was silent for a moment.

"If I did, I'd take you along, grandpa. But not Mrs. Derricks."

"Why not her?"

"Because she breathes loud. My father, if he was a king, wouldn't like people to breathe loud in his palace. I don't like it myself."

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### III

In spite of his deformity Abe got about on his crutches with astonishing speed, and could ascend and descend the steep path between his grandfather's airy home and the village below with the sure-footedness of a goat. Swimming and skating were beyond his power, but he could play most of the games that the other boys played, and was never known to ask quarter on account of the cruel handicap he had received in babyhood.

But it was in invention, in bold imagination, in planning a Saturday afternoon's campaign, that Abe outshone all his companions as the sun outshines the moon; and it was these qualities which had made him their natural chieftain. Hence his grandfather's big barn, in spite of its rather out-of-the-way situation, was headquarters for the small boys of the village.

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One end of the mow, which Aaron Hathaway had set aside for Abe, served equally well for a steamboat cabin, a king's palace, or a robber's cave. It was hung with circus bills, advertisements, and other choice works of art. It contained a menagerie of white mice, rabbits, a woodchuck, and a broken-winged crow. The floor was littered with arrow-heads, shells, and odd-shaped pebbles picked up on the sand-bar just above the village. The beam which answered for a shelf was laden with a miscellaneous assortment—an air-gun, a rusty old pistol that hadn't smelt powder in twenty years, sling-shots, fish-hooks, lines, poles, steel-traps, a bottle of "fish-worm oil" with which to rub one's limbs and make them limber when practicing for a "circus," and a few well-thumbed dime novels, valued more for their pictures than the text, as the habitués of the place had scarcely reached the reading age.

More than one solicitous mother in the village wondered what entertainments her boy found in that big barn on the hill; for Abe, though loved by everybody, was a mystery to everybody. Moreover, Aaron Hathaway,

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though eminently respectable, was regarded as an "infidel"—a word of much wider and graver implication in the average village mind than any dictionary would sanction; and, having never married, he was suspected of being a woman-hater.

Yet those people who were always predicting that he would have his barn burned some day by turning it into a playhouse for boys, would have been astonished at the rigidity with which Abe enforced the rule that no matches were to be brought inside. Grape-vine cigars and corn-silk cigarettes were, no doubt, smoked, but never inside the fire limits.

Abe, however, did not always choose to play with the boys, even when he was well; and he was very, very often not well. Instead, he would bask in the sun on the steps of the porch; or, if he could not secure privacy here, he would steal away to a favorite rock of his overlooking the beautiful river below, and sit by the hour with his prematurely aged face sunk between his high, crutch-warped shoulders.

At such times his pale blue eyes, steeped in revery, seemed to reflect the garnered wis-

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dom and experience of a hoary antiquity. Aaron Hathaway, pausing at a safe distance, would often watch the child with dull wonder and shake his puzzled head. Even the irrepressible boys had learned to shun the neighborhood when Abe had one of his "spells."

What thoughts trooped through his queer little brain as he sat there so still, hour after hour, with his thin, wasted hand on the back of his faithful dog? Sad thoughts, surely, for occasionally his flat chest would flutter with a sigh, his teeth press his trembling lower lip, and slow tears roll down his cheek. If no one intruded, he would let them roll unheeded; but at sight of anyone, even his grandfather, or Mr. Barnes, the young Methodist minister in the village and one of Abe's best friends, he would fiercely dash the telltale drops away, call his dog, and hobble swiftly off. But in a few minutes he would return to the favorite spot by a circuitous route and seat himself as before, with Watch stretched at his side.

The child passionately loved steamboats, in spite of the ill turn one of them had served him—possibly because of it. He carried a little notebook in which he laboriously recorded

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the name of every strange one that passed. He knew the whistle of all the regular ones. The local packets, the only boats which customarily stopped at Angel's, seldom landed without finding him at the wharf; and he was known to every mate and captain on these lines between Cincinnati and Cairo.

From his favorite rock he would watch for the smoke of the boats long before they swung into sight around the bend. As they swept grandly by, with black smoke pouring from their twin chimneys, and their big side-wheels beating the water into a creamy foam, his heart would quicken. Sometimes he would venture to wave his cap. The salute seldom brought any response, for the little figure in its embowered crow's-nest was but a spot to the passengers; yet occasionally a handkerchief was fluttered from the hurricane-deck in return.

At still rarer intervals some pilot who knew the child and had not forgotten his own boyhood days, would respond with a hoarse blast. It always came to the little boy like a voice from a beautiful, mysterious world out of which he was to be forever shut; and with

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glistening eyes he would watch the noble craft until she faded from his sight around the bend, and showed her progress by only a trailing cloud of smoke above the intervening hills.

Abe wondered whence the boats came and whither they went. With his dim, little-boy notions of geography, these floating palaces from the great outside world were freighted with romance and mystery. To be the pilot of one of them was the supremest exaltation he could imagine as being allowed to man. To spin that great wheel, to pull the whistle-rope, to jangle the engine-bells, and swing the big boat as if she were a chip—what could be finer or more thrilling!

Perhaps the fact that he himself had come out of the unknown, along this great watery highway, had much to do with his day-dreams. Had his boat not blown up, where would he have gone? Where would he have been to-day? As the wild goose arrested in its imperial flight by the hunter's leaden hail, beats its broken wing in vain against the cramping limits of its pen, so did little Abe, though unconsciously, chafe against his limitations.



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He was not with his kind. They, with his father and mother, had gone on—most of them to watery graves, but some of them to that enchanted, haunted land in the South of which he knew nothing from books, but from which, in the spring, came the birds, and the sunshine, and the warm winds freighted with the breath of flowers, the glint of insect wings, and the murmur of renewed life. For the procession of the seasons was to him, who knew nothing of solstices and equinoxes, a magnificent pageant, the embodiment and showing forth of a power neither understood nor understandable by man.

It was difficult, of course, for anyone to offer the sensitive boy sympathy. There was no woman to do it, for Mrs. Derricks had never succeeded in winning his confidence, and Aaron Hathaway would as soon have attempted to unravel with his clumsy fingers the gossamer webs which lay on his door-yard grass of a dewy morning. The young minister was the only one who had really ever tried to capture the citadel of the boy's soul, and even he only after a long, patient, and cautious approach.

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"Won't you tell me what the trouble is, Abe?" he asked encouragingly one day, when his walk had suddenly brought him into the presence of the pathetic little figure on the big rock.

The child's face was still streaked with tears, but he answered in a cold, proud little voice: "I ain't in no trouble."

"I fear you are," persisted Mr. Barnes gently. "You seem to have been crying. Trouble is nothing to be ashamed of. It comes to us all, and it usually brings tears with it. I shouldn't care much for the man or boy who didn't cry sometimes. The very greatest men that I ever heard of had their troubles. They cried, too."

"Not the President of the United States?" said Abe, fixing a pair of incredulous eyes upon the speaker.

"Yes, even the President of the United States."

Abe sat very still for a moment. His mind, though, was anything but still; and he was plainly nerving himself up to something, for his fingers gradually tightened over the hair on Watch's back.

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"Won't you tell me?" repeated the minister, at the psychological moment.

"You'd laugh!" said Abe suspiciously.

"My dear little boy, I never laughed at anyone in trouble in all my life," answered the other earnestly. "On the contrary, I have consecrated my life to helping those who are in trouble—and that means you just as much as anyone else."

"Mine ain't real trouble, I guess," began Abe slowly, very slowly. "But I—I git to thinkin' about the birds—and the sunshine—and the trees. I wonder where the wind comes from—and what makes the clouds—and where the flowers go when they die—and if God kin hear prayers that ain't said in churches—and if dogs go to heaven—and if crippled boys kin fly as fast, when they git to be angels, as if their legs was straight?"

He lifted a still half-suspicious face to the minister. But the lines which pain had engraven upon it, and the hope which gleamed from his eyes, gave it an infinite pathos, and a lump suddenly rose in Mr. Barnes's throat. As best he could he cleared away the little

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philosopher's perplexities—which, after all, were but the eternal perplexities of humanity stated in their simplest terms.

His explanation may not have been entirely clear to the boy, but his sympathy certainly was, and that was the important thing. Then he told Abe a story—an old, old story, but one which Abe had not heard before—about a little boy who lived a long time ago, in a little town no bigger than Angel's Landing, but who was wise enough to teach the learned men in the temple; and who, when He became a man, was great enough to die in order that others might live.

Abe's attention could always be caught by this device. He dearly loved a story. On summer nights he used to go down to the village, slip into a dark corner on the veranda of the Boatmen's House, and listen by the hour to the yarns that were spun there. Most of the stories related to river life; and the occasional boat which passed in plain view from the veranda was the finest kind of sauce for them. Sometimes stories were told which were not good for little boys' ears—or big boys' either, for that matter; but his innocence

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was his safeguard, so that it was rarely that his cheeks were made to burn. But when this thing did happen, he would steal shamefacedly away, and his corner would be vacant for the next two or three nights.

But of all the story-tellers that ever sat on the Boatmen's porch and spat tobacco-juice over the rail, none could, in Abe's opinion, equal Swan Swanson, a big Swede who for half a lifetime had sailed before the mast and seen strange sights in many lands. It was a source of mighty pride to Abe that this great personage was his own grandfather's hired man. Yet Swan never told his best stories at the farm-house; he reserved these for the larger audience at the Boatmen's; and when he lit his pipe after supper, and bent his steps thither, Abe usually hobbled alongside, with Watch at his heels.

The rendezvous reached, Abe, stowed away in his corner, breathless, motionless, would listen by the hour as the weatherbeaten old Norseman wove his glowing web of fact and fiction. Sometimes, as the night grew late, Hamilton the proprietor would say: "Don't you think you had better run home now, Abie,

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and go to bed?" But the boy would silently shake his head, and never take his eyes from the story-teller. No bed for him until Swan arose and knocked the ashes from his pipe—a wonderful instrument, carved in the shape of a mermaid, and stained by the nicotine of many years to a rich, glossy brown. Abe had heard Swan refuse ten dollars for it—and ten dollars was more money than Abe had ever seen at any one time in his life.

One night, after Swan had fairly outdone himself in relating a cruise through the Polynesians, Abe could not sleep. Coconut groves, white beaches glistening under a tropical sun, and nut-brown, naked natives paddling about in their canoes, marched and countermarched through his brain in endless evolutions.

At last, with hot face and throbbing pulse, he sat upright in bed, reached for his crutches, slipped noiselessly to the floor, and lit a candle. Watch, who always slept across the foot of the bed, in spite of Mrs. Derricks's protestations, leaped to the floor, stretched, and looked up at Abe as if inquiring what this nocturnal performance might mean. He needed no in-

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vation to follow, however, for wherever Abe went he went.

Stealthily, lest he awaken Mrs. Derricks, Abe crept down the hall to Swan Swanson's door, which he entered without knocking, and cautiously closed behind him.

"Swan!" he whispered hoarsely.

But the torpid Swede, with his four or five glasses of beer still on him, was not thus to be aroused; and it was only after Abe had shaken him for some time that he rose to his elbow, rubbed his eyes, and asked what the trouble might be.

"Say, Swan," began Abe, in a suppressed, excited voice, "could a crippled man that was handy on his crutches git a job on one of them spice ships?"

"Well, I don't know," answered Swan, slowly, willing, like everybody else, to humor the child. "If I 'member right, our second cook on the *Climax* had a club foot."

"I wouldn't cook," cut in Abe decisively. "That's a woman's work."

"Not on a ship, it ain't—you bet your life, it ain't," returned the Swede sturdily. "I've cooked myself."

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This certainly put cooking in a new light, and Abe reflected for a moment, with his eyes scintillating in the flare of the candle.

"Do they allow dogs on them ships, Swan?" he asked finally.

"Yep—good dogs. But you wasn't thinkin' of takin' Watch, was you? For by the time you are a man, lad, you know, Watch will be plumb played out by old age."

The child gave the man a quick, startled glance.

"Why, don't dogs live as long as people?" he queried shrilly.

"Well, come to think of it, they do, sometimes—as long as some people," answered Swan, with a pitying glance at the frail little figure in the striped nightgown.

"What made you say they didn't, then?" demanded the child suspiciously.

"*Cats* is what I was thinkin' of, Abe—cut me hawser if it wasn't! Cats! Cats ain't got no life at all to speak of. But dogs! Pshaw! Ain't you ever heard people say they ain't seen somebody for a dog's age? They always mean a long time when they say that."

"Then Watch will live as long as me, won't



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he?" asked Abe, dropping his right hand into its favorite place on the dog's back.

"I shouldn't be at all surprised if he did," answered the Swede, with a note of sadness in his voice, for he loved the child. "No, I shouldn't be at all surprised if he did. But you must run back to bed, lad, or you'll be ketchin' cold."

The boy turned obediently—he was always as potter's clay in the hands of any idol of his—but paused at the door.

"I want to take him along, Swan," he said, in a voice trembling with pride and affection, "because him and me understand each other so good. And if a whale should smash the boat I was in, with his tail, when we was rowin' round to see the sights, and throw me into the water, like one did you once, Watch would swim out for me and fight the sharruks off."

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### IV

ON the morning of Abe's birthday—the day, at least, which Aaron Hathaway had set aside to be observed as such—when the boy awoke and reached for his crutches, his hand paused in mid-air. For there in the corner stood, not the rough, home-made crutches which he had used for the last two years and which were getting too short for him, but a brand-new, brightly varnished, nickel-mounted pair. Nothing else in the room could compare with their glittering splendor, and the boy gazed at them with fascinated eyes. He had never dreamed that crutches could be made so beautiful. Even Watch, after leaping to the floor and stretching himself, sniffed at the rubber tips, and ran an inquiring tongue over the varnish.

“Watch,” cried Abe ecstatically, “them's new crutches, and they cost a lot of money,

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you kin bet! This is my birthday, and Mr. Barnes give 'em to me, I know, because he said he had something for me I'd like. You and me'll go down to the post-office the first thing after breakfast and show 'em off. But you mustn't lick 'em that way, 'cause you'll take all the varnish off, and I want to keep 'em nice and shiny till you and me go on that spice ship. The captain will think we're rich when he sees these, and give us a job quicker."

He whipped his night-shirt over his head, baring his poor little bony, crooked, brown body, and got into his clothes in a jiffy. Then seizing his new crutches, he took three or four rapid turns around the room to test them. They worked perfectly, and he paused and gazed at them long and lovingly.

"Watch, these crutches are hummers!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "They fit me exactly, and them rubber tips stick to the carpet like glue. Can't we climb The Rocks with them, though!" "The Rocks" was the local name for the bluff just back of the village, and was traversed by the path leading down from Hathaway's.

When Abe reached the kitchen, where he

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always washed, Swan Swanson, Mr. Hathaway, and the housekeeper were eating breakfast. They hailed him with simple congratulations, and he saw that each of them had placed a little remembrance at his plate—a dried starfish, which the boy had long coveted, from Swan; a jack-knife from his grandfather, and a necktie from Mrs. Dericks.

But everybody's interest centered in the crutches. Abe was always averse to "showing off"; but on the present occasion he unbent enough to cross the room in three swings, spin about, and perform several other evolutions.

"See there!" he exclaimed, spreading the crutches as far as he could. "They won't even slip that far apart—and on wood, too."

"I never thought of puttin' rubber tips on your old ones, Abie," observed Hathaway.

The child looked up instantly.

"But they was mighty good ones, grandpa. Stronger than these, too, I reckon. The boys always throwed 'em into hickory-nut and persimmon trees, when we couldn't find clubs, and they never broke one yet."

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"I guess you won't let 'em throw these new ones up, will you?" asked Swan, as he stowed the bacon and eggs away in huge mouthfuls.

"Not much," answered Abe emphatically. "They'd scratch these. And I wouldn't have let 'em throw the old ones, either, if they'd been varnished."

"You must go down and thank Mr. Barnes for them right after breakfast," observed Mrs. Derricks. She would have loved to mother the child more if he would only have let her.

Abe liked the young minister in spite of his good clothes and soft, white hands. The minister couldn't measure up to Swan Swanson, of course—no one that Abe knew could do that. But Abe was daily discovering resemblances between the two that he had not suspected before! Both were good to him, but never "babied" him—he despised coddling. Both were kind to dumb animals, and both spoke out their sentiments—two traits which Abe regarded as cardinal virtues.

After breakfast he went down to the parsonage on his new crutches. Pretty young Mrs. Barnes smilingly showed him into her hus-

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band's study, where Abe stood for one awkward, embarrassed moment twirling his cap in his hands and furtively eyeing the books and pictures. He was always shy, not to say suspicious, of women. Moreover, here in a minister's study he felt almost as if he were in church, and church was a place where he was never at ease. Neither his grandfather nor Swan Swanson, both of whom he admired, ever went to church. Mrs. Derricks, whom he distinctly did not admire, always went. These considerations alone would have kept Abe away.

"A happy birthday, Abe!" said the minister cheerily. "Won't you sit down?"

"I ain't got time—Watch is waitin' for me outside. I just come to thank you for these here crutches, Mr. Barnes. You couldn't a-give me anything I'd like better, and—and they fit me fine. Maybe I kin do something for you sometime," he added, with a blush at the improbability of such a contingency. "If I kin, I want you to call on me."

"You can do something for me now, Abe, if you will," said Mr. Barnes unexpectedly. "If you will only promise to come to Sunday-

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school next Sunday, and try it just once, I shall feel more than repaid for what those crutches cost me."

He had made the same request many times before, and Abe had as many times refused, point-blank. But now, laboring under a sense of obligation and committed by his words of the moment before, the boy dropped his eyes and picked irresolutely at his cap. Warped in mind as well as body, capricious, suspicious, and full of prejudices, and brought up in a home where religion was an unknown topic, Abe had conceived a deep-seated hostility for the smug little boys and girls who trooped to Sunday-school each Sunday morning, dressed in their best, while he and his harum-scarum companions were playing about as usual; and he had boasted more than once to the latter that he would never be caught in such snobbish company.

"Mr. Barnes," he began, white to the lips, "I have told the boys that I'd never go to Sunday-school."

"That makes no difference," answered the minister quietly. "That was only a brag, not a promise. And even had it been a promise,

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it's better to break a bad promise than to keep it."

"But if you did, people wouldn't believe you any more," objected Abe.

"It isn't often that you would have to do such a thing—not often enough to shatter faith in your word. But it's even better to do right than to have the reputation of always keeping your word—valuable as that reputation is."

This was a new and startling doctrine to Abe, and he pondered it a moment. If he could only have had time to get Swan Swanson's opinion on it!

"Would I have to set with a girl?" he asked finally. Mrs. Barnes dropped her eyes to hide a twinkle.

"No. I'll put you in a boys' class, and Mrs. Barnes here shall be your teacher. You will like her, I am sure."

Abe did not say whether he thought so or not.

"How much money do you have to bring?" he asked.

"You don't *have* to bring any. The scholars usually choose to bring some, though. It



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goes to help poor little girls and boys in far-away, heathen lands. But you needn't bring any unless you feel like it."

"Oh, I kin pay my way," said Abe haughtily.

"It is not a question of paying your way," said Mr. Barnes firmly. "There is no way to be paid. It's as free as air. But if you feel disposed, a penny or two will do. That is what boys of your age usually bring."

"I'll bring a nickel, then. Good day."

He clapped his hat on his head, and with long, swinging strides—first of body, then of crutches—passed swiftly out. Mr. Barnes, half regretting the advantage he had taken of the occasion, stepped to the door.

"You understand, do you, Abe," he called, "that I didn't invite you for the sake of your nickel, but for your own sake?"

"Oh, I know that," answered Abe, with prompt magnanimity, in spite of his ruffled feelings. "If you was the kind that holds out for a nickel, you wouldn't have give me these crutches."

He started for the post-office, but vanished in the next block for a moment in the nar-

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row opening between two buildings. When screened from view, he hastily drew a little white rag from his pocket and wiped the dust from the tips of his crutches, though his rusty little shoes hadn't tasted blacking since the day they left the store. Then carefully tucking the rag back, so that no boy should by any chance spy it out, he resumed his way.

He had soon collected from the vicinity of the post-office a train of admiring youths, whom he led to their favorite playground—some vacant lots, knee-deep with dog-fennel and jimson-weed, back of the Boatmen's House. Here the boys were allowed to handle the new crutches, and even to try them, after being warned not to scratch the varnish.

"What do you suppose they cost?" asked Billy Mixon enviously.

"Oh, about twenty-five dollars," said Abe, with an off-hand manner that was vastly impressive.

"Whew! Is them plates solid silver?"

Abe gave the doubting Thomas a withering look.

"Do you suppose they would put anything but solid silver on *crutches*?" he demanded

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scornfully. "They make up crutches just like they do coffins."

Billy subsided, but Ned Allison said: "Just the same, I'd sooner have a good pair of legs."

Abe winced, for he was very sensitive about his deformity except when it could be used to his aggrandizement, when he was willing enough to exhibit it. But he had not become captain of this wild crew by chance, and he knew well how to quell a mutiny.

"That shows *your* sense," he retorted instantly. "Anybody kin have a good pair of legs. I could myself. I could have my legs fixed for five dollars by a doctor. I've got the five, too," he added with unblushing mendacity. "But I wouldn't do it. I'd sooner have my crutches. They look more stylish, and I kin do more things on 'em. I kin go upstairs six different ways. Besides," he added conclusively, "the greatest general that ever lived used to have crutches, and he had a million soldiers in his army, and none of 'em was as good a fighter as he was."

"What was his name, Abe?" asked Red Maginnis, in an awed voice. Red was Abe's unfailing hewer of wood and drawer of water.

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"I'll tell you some time, Red, when we're alone," answered Abe darkly.

That afternoon Red might have been seen in the Maginnises' back yard, with one leg tied up with a string and Abe's old crutches under his arm, going through certain evolutions under the direction of the little cripple. Meanwhile, the other boys, sternly excluded by Abe as a penalty for their skepticism of the forenoon, peeped enviously through the cracks and the knot-holes in the high board fence.

On the next Sunday it happened that Abe was sick. Sickness was nothing unusual with him, so that often when the boys of a morning climbed to the farm-house on the hill and whistled and trilled for their chieftain, Mrs. Derricks would step to the door and say: "Run home, boys. Abe is sick to-day." But this time, weak and trembling though he was, and unable to swallow even the bit of toast Mrs. Derricks brought to his bedside, he insisted on getting up and going to Sunday-school.

"What possesses the boy that he wants to go to Sunday-school so bad, all of a sudden?"

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Hathaway inquired of Mrs. Derricks, as if suspecting that she had been tampering with Abe.

"He promised Mr. Barnes. I'm glad he did, too. It's a shame for a child to grow up with no more religious instruction than he has had. But he ain't no more fit to go this morning than he is to climb a greased pole, and I don't know what to do with him."

"Better let him go if he wants to," observed Hathaway, lighting his pipe, and thus washing his hands of the matter.

"Yes, Aaron Hathaway, you'd say let him go if he was comin' down with typhoid fever this minute," answered the housekeeper sharply. "I can't lay my conscience aside that easy."

"I reckon he ain't got typhoid," returned the farmer imperturbably, and passed out to the porch.

"Abie, dear, Mr. Barnes won't expect you to come if you are sick," said Mrs. Derricks in distress, as the child came downstairs, wan and spiritless, but dressed in his best suit. "I'll take word to him myself, so that he'll be sure to know, if you'll stay home."

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"Don't you dare, Mrs. Derricks," said the boy earnestly. "He'll think I'm playin' off on him, and that I'm a liar. 'Cause he knows I don't *want* to go."

So off he went, leaving Mrs. Derricks with an ache in her heart. He would have been nervous under any circumstances on this first trip to Sunday-school. But between his weakness and fear of being late, as well as keeping an eye open for the companions whom he felt that he was deserting and whose taunts he dreaded, he reached the church door in a panting condition.

As he hobbled up the aisle the room swam before his eyes, and the buzz of the school became a roar in his ears. Growing still fainter, he was forced to stop just opposite a class of girls—the last place he would have chosen for a halt. But rather than drop there, he would die; and with set teeth and straining heart he moved on a few paces toward Mrs. Barnes, who, all unconscious of his trouble, was smilingly awaiting him. He reached her pew and then quietly sank to the floor in a swoon.

When he regained his senses, he found himself in Mr. Barnes's arms, in the vestibule of

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the church, with water on his face, and several ladies anxiously peering into his eyes.

"I am going to take you to the parsonage, Abe," said the minister. "You've had a weak turn."

"Wait!" whispered the boy. "I want to leave my nickel first. It's in my vest pocket."

One of the ladies, with tears in her eyes, fumbled with gloved fingers in the little stuffed pocket, among buttons and exploded cartridges, a buckeye, a fish-hook stuck in a cork, and the stub of a lead pencil, until she found the nickel which he had earned the day before by selling old iron to a junk-boat which had tied up at Angel's Landing. His grandfather would have given him the money, but in view of the purpose for which it was intended, Abe had been too proud to ask for it. He knew that his grandfather had no love for churches.

He remained at the parsonage for dinner that day, although it was very little that he could eat, and that only while lying down. The tender manner in which Mrs. Barnes hovered over him, tucking an extra pillow under his head and a napkin under his chin, touched

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even his little woman-wary heart; and made him wonder if some women, at least, were not better than he had thought them to be. Heretofore, he had assigned them all to one class, of which Mrs. Derricks was the type.

About sunset Mr. Barnes took Abe home in a buggy borrowed from a parishioner, and carried him up upstairs to bed. Abe protested that he was all right and could walk. But it was three days before his pale face and limp body appeared in the sunshine on the porch steps again.



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### V

IN the fall Abe started to school. If Mrs. Derricks had had her way, he would have started two years earlier. But Aaron Hathaway, though ordinarily a strict disciplinarian and a man of rigid opinions, was strangely tolerant of Abe's caprices. And Abe had shrunk so from the thought of school that Hathaway could not find it in his heart to force him to go.

Abe had doubtless been prejudiced against school by the fact that two or three boys in the village of undisputed prowess—they occasionally took a smoke or a chew of tobacco on the sly—did not go to school, but preferred to hunt muskrats in Sugar Creek, or fish from the wharf. His chief objection, though, to school had been the necessity of submitting to the authority of a woman. This thought had galled him inexpressibly; and he could not understand why his grandfather, who had

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never married, or had associated any woman with him except in a menial capacity, like Mrs. Derricks, should ask him to subject himself to a woman school-teacher.

But some one, presumably Mrs. Barnes, had been at work upon Abe; and when his grandfather, in the latter part of August, casually suggested school, as he had done for two Augusts past, Abe agreed to try it.

"But you know, grandfather," said he almost tremulously, "that I won't stand no foolin'. And you wouldn't want me to, either—from a woman. Would you?"

"No, my boy, I wouldn't," answered Hathaway. "But, of course, women are different from men, you know, Abe. And you might think they were fooling when they weren't. Go easy with the school-teacher and give her a chance."

"I will," the boy promised. "But I won't let any woman come it over me the way Roy Jones's mother comes it over him and her husband. Why, Mr. Jones dassent set a mouse-trap in his own store without astin' her. And I don't want to be babied, neither. Women just does that to git you to do something you

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don't want to do. Last week Billy Gammel wanted to go swimmin' in the river instead of the crick; and his mother was afraid he'd git drowned and told him not to go; and he went anyway, with me and some other boys; and when he went home I waited behind an ash-barrel to see whether he was goin' to git licked, before I went in to see a rabbit trap he'd made; and when she seen his hair was wet she didn't lick him at all, which he wouldn't have cared for, because she don't hit hard, but just cried and patted him on the head; and then he begun to cry, too; and now he says he won't go swimmin' any more except in the crick."

"I presume it's quite likely his mother did feel bad, though, Abe," ventured the grandfather. "I wouldn't call that comin' it over Billy."

Abe was silent for a moment, thinking of the tears he had seen in the eyes of the lady who took the nickel from his pocket the day he fainted in Sunday-school. Maybe his grandfather was right. *She* certainly couldn't have been trying to "come it over" him, for she had not asked him to do anything.

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"Well, mebbe she wasn't," he admitted, with a faraway light in his eyes.

There were moments when Aaron Hathaway was almost afraid of the weird little creature which the river had brought him. At times the boy seemed to speak out of a wisdom as old as humanity and as wide as the world itself. While full of prejudices and crotchets, and the willing slave of romantic fancies, he at the same time had a perspicacity which verged on the uncanny. Often, in the evening, when under one of the curious, periodical spells of excitement to which he was subject, his tongue would run incessantly from supper to bedtime, accompanied by his shrill little laugh; and in the midst of much that was trivial and childish he would occasionally drop an observation so shrewd, so full of wisdom, so far beyond a normal child, that Mrs. Derricks would ominously shake her head. Sometimes she would leave the room, for such a performance "got on her nerves," she said. It occasionally got on Aaron Hathaway's nerves as well, whip-cord though they were.

At such times the thought often came to him, with the sharpness of a knife thrust, that Abe

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could not live long; that his inner fires, burning at this terrific rate, must soon consume his little shell of a body. And perhaps it was the fear that school would unduly stimulate this already overactive mind that had made him so reluctant to force the child to go against his will.

On the opening day of school, a bracing, crystal-clear September morning, Abe started off with a First Reader and a slate strapped to one crutch. Watch, as usual, was at his heels.

"You better leave Watch home, hadn't you?" suggested the grandfather. He had purposely tarried around the house, under pretext of grinding an ax, until Abe should start.

"Why, can't you take dogs to school?" demanded Abe in astonishment.

"I reckon not. Didn't you ever hear about the lamb that Mary took to school? It made a lot of trouble, and a dog would be about as bad."

"Then I won't go myself," declared the boy promptly, and faced about.

"You might leave Watch home to-day, and

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ask the teacher about his coming to-morrow," suggested Hathaway.

This compromise struck Abe as fair, and after a little reflection he again started off, commanding Watch to stay. The dog reluctantly turned back.

At the first tap of the second bell, Abe, who had been leaning disconsolately against the schoolhouse, dreading the coming ordeal, and with no heart for the game of prisoner's base which the boys were playing, went inside. He saw a tall, handsome young woman, with dark hair parted in the middle and lying in a heavy coil on the back of her neck. One white, round arm, gleaming through the thin sleeve which the weather still permitted, was uplifted to the bell-rope. There was a statuesque strength as well as grace about her figure which stamped itself upon Abe's imagination; and long after he had come to know Miss Harrow well, his favorite memory-picture of her was as she stood on that first day of school.

Thus it was that her personality came to Abe as a glorious revelation; for, in addition to his small opinion of women in general, he

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had heard some of the boys speak slightly of the new teacher, echoing what they had heard at home from parents who had hoped that a man would be hired this year. Some people believed, on very good grounds, too, that only a man could control the rowdy element in the Angel's Landing school.

It would have done these fearful ones good to be present on this morning. As the pupils entered in the rank disorder of a first day, pushing and jostling one another, Abe saw one of the big boys stick out his foot and trip a smaller boy. Some one else saw it, too.

"Halt!"

The word rang out like a command on the field of battle, and every pupil stood rooted in his tracks. The contest for supremacy to which every new teacher was challenged, was apparently already at hand.

"I don't know the name of that big, red-headed boy who just tripped another boy," began Miss Harrow, not angrily, not even loudly, but in tones which fell like a whiplash, and made the culprit's face match his hair. "And I want to say that I don't expect to know his name if his present conduct is a sam-

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ple of what he has in store for us. I shall have no need to know it, for his seat will be empty. I shall not attempt to whip him or any other boy of his size. I am here to teach, not to wrestle. For the next offense of that kind, he may take his books and go home and stay there. I'll have no rowdies in this school. Those who come here to learn, and to become young ladies and gentlemen, shall not be contaminated. Take your seats."

Her resolute words rang in Abe's ears like trumpet notes. It was the finest oration he had ever heard, and it was impossible to escape the conviction that she meant just what she said. Moreover, it awoke him to undreamed-of possibilities in a woman. Naggers and criers were the two types of women which he had hitherto known in his limited experience—with a few exceptions. He had always greatly admired Tom Barnum, the red-headed culprit; but when the boy slunk to his seat, his freckled face covered with confusion and his white eyelashes blinking rapidly, Abe, with the mercilessness of youth, felt nothing but contempt for him.



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He did not speak to the teacher, either that day or the next, about Watch. His courage failed him. But on the third day his conscience, as he recalled Watch's downcast air of a morning, pricked him to action. He was the only scholar who carried his dinner; and Miss Harrow having tarried a moment after dismissing the school at noon, he came forward.

"Miss Harrow," he began in a slightly tremulous voice; "my best friend is a dog, and his name is Watch, and I wanted to know if I could bring him to school with me. He gits pretty lonesome stayin' home all day without me."

"And do you get lonesome without him?" asked the teacher with a smile.

"Yessum, especially goin' home nights. But I ain't askin' for my own sake. I could stand it."

Miss Harrow studied a moment. The little cripple had captivated her almost as promptly as she had him. She had learned his history, and had formed a shrewd conjecture of the limitations of his home life. She had already discovered that he, though only a child,

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fiercely resented distinction from the older pupils; or that, in his own words, he would not stand "babying."

She was sure that he was not vicious; but no mother's love had ever nourished his affections, and association with the wild village boys and the gross habitués of the wharf, the Boatmen's House, and other public places, had cauterized his little heart. Tenderness, in his eyes, for instance, was unmanly. Admiration of anything or anybody was a weakness. Pity was effeminate; love between the sexes a stock joke; and respect for a woman, simply because she was a woman, mawkish sentimentality.

Her guesses were very near the truth. Abe imagined that all good women were "stuck up." The women whose deeds he had heard most about—through the gossipy old rivermen—were those painted harpies who used to make regular trips up and down the river on the steamboats, rustling about in silk petticoats, leaving a trail of musk behind them, masquerading under a different name each trip, and looking upon all men as legitimate prey.

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Yet, under his shell, as Miss Harrow had discovered, Abe was as sensitive as any little girl, and, she believed, as innocent. His pride, too, in his integrity and loyalty to his friends was something touching. In short, he presented a fascinating field for a woman of Miss Harrow's instincts to work in; and she wanted to draw just as close to his wary little heart as she could.

"I should love to have your dog here, Abe," said she. "I love dogs myself, and have two of them at home—a water spaniel and a black-and-white setter. I wanted to bring them with me so badly, but I couldn't. I presume they, too, are lonely without me.

"If Watch came to school," she continued reflectively, "you would have to make him lie under your desk, so that he wouldn't disturb the pupils, and I am afraid that would be cruel to him. To lie still, you know, is very hard for a dog. Don't you think that he would really prefer staying home to lying still all day? Then, again, haven't you noticed how much gladder he is to see you at night, after being away from you all day, just as you are gladder to see him? Moreover, if I let you

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bring your dog, the other boys would want to bring theirs, and we'd have fights on our hands right here in the schoolhouse."

"Watch kin lick any dog in town," interpolated Abe proudly.

"I don't doubt that, but I fear we couldn't do much studying with a dog-fight liable to break out at any minute. What do you think about it yourself? I want to do just the right thing."

"I reckon you're right," he answered slowly, after a moment's silence. "I hadn't thought about all them things before. And I wouldn't want to make Watch lay still all day if it hurt him."

"Very well, then," said she softly. "Meanwhile, now that I have the chance, I want to speak to you about your lessons. This is your first year, but I find you can read so well that I don't want to keep you in Class B very long. It will be so much more interesting for you in Class A. Now, if you study hard, I think I can soon promote you. Would you be willing to try for a promotion?"

He looked up at her out of his prematurely shrewd, old-mannish eyes.

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"You wouldn't tell me that, teacher, just to make me study, would you?" he asked.

Miss Harrow caught her breath, and a beautiful flush overspread her cheeks.

"My dear child," she asked, with an emotion which she herself, much less Abe, hardly understood, "do you think that I am that kind of a woman—that I would ever attempt to deceive you?"

He suddenly dropped his eyes, overcome with shame.

"No'm," he answered almost inaudibly.

As she drew a clean, white, scented handkerchief from her belt and touched her eyes with it, he crept guiltily back to his seat. He did not eat his lunch after she had gone, but sat there, throughout the noon hour, conscience-stricken. He felt just as he had once felt when he killed a bluebird with a sling-shot.

The idea of making an apology did not occur to him. Such a restitution was beyond his social experience, and all that he could do was to resolve to atone for his sin by being very good to his teacher in the future. Hence the next day he brought her an apple, leaving it

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secretly on her desk at noon. To have let her know that he had brought it would have deprived the act of its value in his eyes.

A few days later he mustered courage enough to loiter around the door, after school, until she came out. But it was not until he had tried this several times that he dared accept her invitation to walk home with her, their roads lying in the same direction. After this, however, he walked home with her almost every day; and one evening at the gate she asked him if he wouldn't like to come in and see her room.

"I ain't hardly got time," he replied evasively, gazing in an embarrassed way up and down the street. He wondered if any of the boys were watching him. "I got some choring to do around home."

"It wouldn't take but a minute to stop a minute," said she with her pleasant laugh.

Once more he glanced up and down the street. No boys were in sight.

"I reckon I kin stop," said he hastily, with a flush. It was to his credit that he did not suspect her this time of trying to "come it over" him.

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It was the first time, with the exception of a few brief, clandestine forays into Mrs. Dericks's plain bedroom at home, that he had ever been in a woman's apartments. How different this from Mrs. Dericks's room! There were pictures on the wall—more pictures than he had ever seen at one time before; a bookcase on one side with some bits of statuary on top; sofa pillows scattered here and there, photographs, and all the pretty little gewgaws with which women love to line their nests. A delicate perfume also hung in the air—the same perfume which Abe had frequently detected on Miss Harrow's person, and which it never occurred to him was other than natural.

He deposited himself uneasily on the extreme edge of the first chair he came to, although she urged him to take a rocker, and he scarcely spoke throughout his brief stay. Miss Harrow, indeed, doubted the success of her experiment, after he had gone. Nevertheless, Abe had been vastly pleased and impressed; and as he toiled up the steep path to his home that delicate perfume seemed still to linger in his nostrils. That night, too, the last thing he thought of before he slipped off into

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unconsciousness was his teacher's beautiful room.

It was not long before "Pet—pet—teacher's pet!" began to be flung slyly at him from behind fences and corners as he went to and from school, or roamed about the village on a Saturday. The first time he heard the dreaded cry, he stopped as suddenly as if accused of murder, his bloodless cheeks grew fiery red, and his hands closed tightly over the cross-pieces of his crutches. He, Abe Hathaway, scoffer of women, a teacher's pet!

His first impulse was never, never to go back to school again. But before morning, after thinking it carefully over, he had changed his mind. Miss Harrow had won him too thoroughly. As a matter of fact, the time had gone by for these taunts to be effective; and as there was no small amount of heroism stored away in his insignificant little body, he resolved to be true to his teacher, cost what it might, and to walk with her just as frequently as before.

Out of fear of their teacher, Abe's tormentors were at first very wary. But one day at recess, led by Tom Barnum, they penned Abe



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in a distant corner of the playground, and began to badger him with the thoughtless cruelty which boys so often wreak upon a weaker playmate. At first they only hooted and jeered, and applied all the opprobrious epithets with which their vocabulary abounded; but finally they began to throw clods and tufts of grass and even quids of tobacco.

Abe suffered in silence, making no futile attempt to escape; but his cheeks were flaming, and a lightning shot from his little gray eyes that should have warned his tormentors not to go too far. They were not warned, however, and Tom Barnum finally snatched Abe's cap from his head and threw it over the fence. As quick as thought, Abe raised one of his crutches and dealt the young bully a stunning blow between the eyes. Barnum dropped with a sickening, dead sound and lay moaning and writhing in the grass.

A part of the juvenile mob stood rooted in horror; others flew for the schoolhouse. Abe himself grimly restored his crutch to his armpit, and without a glance at his fallen foe slowly hobbled away.

The wildest excitement reigned for a time.

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But when Miss Harrow had restored the unfortunate Barnum to his senses and excused him for the day, with his head bound up in a handkerchief, she returned to the schoolhouse with her brood of children in something like order. Abe was in his seat, pale but composed, and did not look up at their entrance.

At noon, after the others had gone, Miss Harrow called him to her desk.

"Abe, I am so sorry over what happened this morning. Tell me all about it, please."

But he only shook his head and set his lips in a manner which his teacher had come to know and to dread. After pleading in vain for an explanation of the affair, she tried another tack.

"Don't you know that you might have killed Tom?" she asked gently.

"I wisht I had!" he burst out passionately, and the tears began to roll down his cheeks. "That's what I tried to do."

Miss Harrow gasped.

"That would have been murder!"

"I could murder him easier'n I could squash a bug," he added bitterly.

"But if you had murdered him, they

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would have sent you to jail, where bad men are put."

No answer.

"Now tell me about it, won't you? Were they teasing you?"

Still no answer.

"Did they call you bad names? Did they call you names that you do not wish to repeat to me?"

He shifted from one uncertain leg to the other, but did not break his silence.

"Are you resolved never to tell me, your best friend, about this trouble? I don't blame you, remember. It may be that you were in the right. I only want to learn the facts. I know you will tell me the truth."

Still no answer. Had it been any other scholar in her school she would have tried a threat of punishment. But she well knew the futility of such a course in this case. Moreover, it would have taken a harder heart than hers to add anything to what the child was already so clearly suffering.

"My dear little boy," said she finally, in a voice throbbing with sympathy, "I love you; and if you will let me I shall kiss you, and

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never say anything more about this to you. Then, in your own good time, you can tell me what you choose."

Motionless, with downcast eyes, he submitted to her kiss without shrinking—the first kiss he remembered ever receiving from anyone except Mrs. Derricks. Then his stoicism melted, and with trembling lips he quavered out:

"They called me 'teacher's pet,' and throwed stones and dirt at me, and Tom Barnum grabbed my cap and throwed it over the fence. It's there yet."

"I'll go and get it," said Miss Harrow huskily.

As she carried the limp, faded little head-piece back to the schoolhouse, her tears flowed fast; and just before she entered the room again she pressed the cap to her lips.

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### VI

In late September, while the Southern Illinois weather was still mild, the tall board fence which veiled the untidy backyard of the Boatmen's House from the public eye was covered with gaudy circus-bills—beautiful women in pink tights turning aërial somersaults, or hanging by their white teeth at a dizzy height, or pirouetting on the back of a horse; half naked black men with spears attacking a mighty rhinoceros in his native jungle; a tiger riding on the back of an elephant; a human pyramid, sustained by one man at the bottom.

The circus was to show in a neighboring town, and very few of the small boys of the Landing had any hopes of seeing even the parade, to say nothing of getting through the enchanted portals of the tent. So they let off their excitement by practicing on trapezes and tight-ropes, and giving a circus of their

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own—a sport from which Abe was debarred by his infirmities. The most he could do was to pay his three pins' admission to the mimic performances, and sit with the girls, while his heart cankered with envy.

But one noon Miss Harrow astounded him by asking if he wouldn't like to go to the circus with her. She explained that she had a brother with the circus whom she hadn't seen for some time, and who had written her to be sure and be present. For a moment, Abe grew fairly dizzy at the prospect; then his face quickly sobered.

"I'd like to go, Miss Harrow, but I ain't got the money," said he dejectedly.

"But we won't need any money!" said she gayly. "We'll go in on passes."

"Without carryin' water to the elephants?" he asked incredulously.

"Certainly!" she laughed. "My brother will give them to us."

Abe could not long keep this momentous secret within the narrow confines of his bosom; so he told Red Maginnis and one or two other friends. They told their friends, soon the news was noised abroad among all

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the boys, and from that moment Abé became an object of mingled envy and respect. He was not only going to the circus, but he was going with "teacher"; and "teacher's" brother, so the rumor ran, owned the circus. Probably Abe would be allowed to pat the tiger on the head, and feed peanuts to the baby elephant! No wonder many a lad grew heart-sick over his own ill fortune.

Sweet as was this fame to Abe, circus day seemed destined never to arrive. But Miss Harrow helped the dragging time to pass by showing Abe a geography up in her room, and explaining the size and shape of the earth, and pointing out the regions where elephants, tigers, lions, and hippopotami ran wild, just like the rabbits about Angel's Landing. To Abe the jungles of Africa were as remote as Mars; and it was only by a great effort, aided by the pictures, that he succeeded at all in projecting his imagination to those distant quarters of the globe. Miss Harrow also told him how these wild animals were captured, trained, and fed.

As a result of all this, Abe had reached such a pitch of anticipation by circus-day eve that

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he did not close his eyes that night; or, if he did close them, it was only in brief, uneasy snatches of sleep, in which he saw tigers dancing on the tips of their tails, lions masquerading in pink tights, and elephants strutting about on tight ropes, with canes and silk hats. His apprehensions that some catastrophe, after all his plans, would keep him away from the circus at the last minute were almost painful. It might pour rain in the morning! The show might burn up! Miss Harrow might die! That he might fall sick under the nervous strain—the most likely catastrophe—did not occur to him at all.

He arose at daylight and put on his best clothes, to which Mrs. Derricks added the unwonted finery of a linen collar and necktie. He forced a little breakfast down his throat for appearance's sake, received an unexpected quarter from his grandfather, said a hasty good-by, and then started for Miss Harrow's house—a good hour and a half ahead of time. But at last she and he were riding along the dusty road, between brown September fields, under a mellow Indian summer sun.

Brazil was full of teams and people when



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they arrived. The livery stable at which they put up their horse was already surrounded by what seemed to Abe acres of buggies and wagons, packed wheel within wheel. Peanut, popcorn, candy and lemonade stands lined the sidewalks. Dark-skinned, foreign-looking men, with little rings in their ears, walked about under a cloud of multihued toy balloons. In the distance arose a great gray, dome-shaped object, with waving banners above—an object which gave Abe a sharp contraction of the heart every time his eye chanced to fall upon it. It was the circus tent!

Miss Harrow had made arrangements with a friend to view the parade from a balcony over the main street, and thither she and Abe slowly made their way through the dense press. From their excellent point of observation Abe saw other little boys below, some with fathers, some with mothers, some with older brothers and sisters.

But none, he felt sure, was with his teacher. Or, if any of those young women were teachers instead of sisters, they were not to be compared with his. They weren't as pretty, and

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they hadn't filled their pupils' pockets with good things to eat, or tied toy balloons to their buttonholes, or bought them whistles you could mock any bird with—after you learned how, so the man said that sold them. And he was sure that none of them had a brother in the circus. Then he would glance admiringly at Miss Harrow's fine profile, and she would smile down at him—if she caught him looking.

In spite of all these pleasant thoughts, however, it seemed as if the parade never would arrive. But at last there came a blare of music in the distance; a ripple of excitement ran through the throng below, followed by a general tiptoeing and craning of necks. Leaning over the balustrade, Abe caught a glint of sunlight on something that shone like gold, and glimpsed a bit of scarlet, and saw a white horse toss its plumed head. The parade was coming!

He closed his eyes, slipped his hand into Miss Harrow's, and tried to imagine that he had been left at home, after all, and was not going to see the circus any more than poor Red Maginnis was, whose mother took in

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washings. He even tried to imagine himself in the woodshed, picking up chips. But at that instant the loud, weird notes of a steam calliope struck his ears, and sent the chills racing up and down his spinal cord until his hair began to lift.

The procession was headed with a carriage drawn by four white horses, and contained four gentlemen in tall, shiny hats. Miss Harrow suddenly waved her handkerchief at the carriage, and one of the gentlemen arose and smilingly lifted his hat. It was Miss Harrow's brother! Abe felt, in that supreme moment, as if he were as close to the calcium light of glory as mortal eyes could well bear to be.

Next came a cavalcade of Arabs—dark, fearsome fellows that Abe did not care to be any nearer to; ladies and gentlemen whom Abe supposed must be at least part owners of the show until Miss Harrow explained that they were acrobats and bareback riders; a band wagon, drawn by twelve horses, which seemed to tower to the heavens; another ponderous, towering structure of gold and silver, tightly closed, and giving no hint of the mys-

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teries within, but groaning on its axles in a hollow, mournful manner that Abe could hear in memory for many a day to come.

Then followed the steam calliope, the Egyptians, the clown in his funny little cart drawn by a balky mule; the elephants, with their splendid trappings and wicked little eyes; the lions, the tigers, the leopards, and hyenas, with their trainers sitting as calmly in their midst as if they had been litters of kittens. Abe firmly believed that if these men had lifted their eyes for one moment from their fierce charges, the penalty would have been instant death.

The child sat through the gorgeous pageant like one in a trance, and Miss Harrow found more entertainment in his rapt face than in the passing show.

"Will the circus this afternoon be as good as this?" he asked with a sigh, when the last chariot had vanished, and he had come back to earth again.

"Oh, yes."

"Will it be better?"

"Yes, much better."

He sighed again. "I don't see how any-

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thing on earth kin be better than this was. Teacher, if you was a man, would you sooner be a cook on a spice ship and go to them strange islands of the sea, or be a pilot on the river, or be a lion tamer—or play on one of them steam calliopes?”

“That’s a rather hard question to answer offhand, Abe,” said Miss Harrow seriously.

“Ain’t it, though!” he exclaimed, his wizened little face lighting with pleasure that she should be able to share his perplexities. So few women could. “I been thinkin’ a whole lot about it, and I ain’t decided it yet.”

Miss Harrow met her brother at the hotel at noon, and had dinner with him, although he said he usually ate in the superintendent’s tent on the grounds. The trio spent an hour together—an hour of silent, breathless worship on Abe’s part—and then Mr. Harrow said he would have to go—that circus men never got a day off. Before leaving, though, he wrote something on a card and handed it to his sister.

“That will pass you and the boy anywhere you choose to go,” said he.

Abe did not doubt Mr. Harrow’s omnipo-

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tence—far from it. Yet he could not believe that that bit of cardboard, with its scrawled signature in indelible pencil, would perform the miracles promised of it; and he fairly shook in his shoes when Miss Harrow presented it to the ticket-taker at one of the side-shows. The man not only honored the pass, however, but handed it back to her with a smile, politely lifted his hat, and said: "Pass right in, madam, and make yourself at home." The bit of cardboard produced the same magic effect at the other side-show, and at the main entrance. At the latter place the man added: "After you have seen the menagerie, madam, show your pass to the ticket-seller in the big tent, and he'll give you and your little boy reserved seats."

"He thought you were my little boy," said Miss Harrow, bending her dark eyes down to Abe. "Don't you wish that you were?"

His own eyes fell. "Yessum, but I don't reckon *you* do."

"Why shouldn't I wish it, too?" she asked with that tender reproach he so often stirred in her.

"I reckon you'd want a boy of your'n to be

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straighter than me—you're so straight and round yourself."

Her silence forced him to glance up at her face. The joy had gone out of it, though he was puzzled to know why, and she did not speak again for a moment.

"Abe," said she then, with marvelous sweetness, "did you never hear that a mother loves her crippled, crooked babe better than she does her straight one? I should do the same."

Abe was once more conscious that he had inadvertently stepped into deeper waters than he could ford.

After making the circuit of the animal tent, in which Abe would have been willing to spend the rest of the day, they passed into the circus proper. At a guess the boy would have pronounced the inclosure a mile long, for the heads of the people at the other end looked like mere dots. The acres of seats seemed already full, and though he and Miss Harrow had no trouble, thanks to the magic cardboard, Abe wondered where all the other people still flocking down the hippodrome or race-course would go. But in an astonishingly short time

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they, too, were provided for and the race-course cleared.

A trumpet sounded, the band began to play, and a gay cavalcade swept out of the dressing-tent into the hippodrome. Next came a regiment of beautiful women, keeping step like soldiers, with the bottoms of their white slippers all stained by the tan-bark. One splendid group followed another in rapid succession, until the whole race-course was a moving mass of color.

After this grand march, as it was called, the performance proper began. Abe's eyes leaped from one to another of the three rings—from the tumblers turning somersaults over elephants to the living statuary; and from the living statuary to the trapezists in their daring, birdlike flights. But it was too much. In trying to see everything, he was really seeing nothing. His mind was stunned by the stupendousness of the spectacle, and he finally fell into a dreamy, dazed condition.

Miss Harrow waked him by touching him on the shoulder and pointing to the middle ring just in front of them. Looking up, he saw that a little girl no bigger than himself



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was putting a gigantic African elephant through a series of tricks. In the hush which followed the unique performance he could hear her shrill commands, although they must have been quickly lost in the depths of that vast canvas amphitheater. He could also plainly see her run forward, with mincing, artificial steps, and prod the huge beast, beside which she looked like an insect.

Abe's heart swelled. And indeed the spectacle was one shrewdly calculated to thrill even an adult when that mighty denizen of the jungle knelt, lay down, rang a bell, trotted around the ring like a penny-dog, and stood upon his hind legs—all at the command of a midget whose body would weigh scarcely more than one of his huge ears.

But the climax came when the child gave a sharp command, and followed it up with a vigorous thrust of her goad. The brute dropped to his knees, placed his corrugated frontlet on the ground, and carefully, with infinite pains, proceeded to stand upon his head. The audience held its breath as the mountain of flesh rose slowly into the air until it had assumed a vertical position and became mo-

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tionless. Then a burst of applause rent the oppressive silence, and the little maiden, facing the audience, bowed her thanks repeatedly.

The elephant resumed his normal position and picked up his little mistress with his trunk to carry her out. But at that instant some irritating odor reached his nostrils or something went wrong. He seized the child with wickedly glowing eyes; and instead of holding her carefully above his head, he swung her swiftly to and fro, meanwhile trumpeting in a shrill, infuriated manner.

Thousands of hearts stood still. The people nearest the ring began to stampede, either climbing higher or dropping through the seats to the ground.

It was to join this flight that Miss Harrow thought Abe bent upon when he seized his crutches. But he sprang down into the race-course, instead; and before any of the circus attachés had recovered from the momentary stupor into which the child's danger had thrown them, Abe, advancing with grotesque, swinging strides, had reached the edge of the ring. He agilely leaped the low barrier, and in another second was under the massive,

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swaying head of the angry elephant. Then, without the slightest hesitation, he lifted one of his crutches and jabbed it with all his strength into the animal's gaping mouth.

Miss Harrow looked on helplessly with a white face. It had all happened so quickly that she had had no time to restrain her charge. But either Abe's bold front or his curious gait had cowed the elephant. He ceased his trumpeting, set his little mistress gently down, and then sinking upon his huge hindquarters, like a whipped spaniel, began to squeal with fear. His trainer came running forward, smiling his admiration and astonishment at the puny hero. A rustle broke the painful silence of the tent, and then a thunderous roar of applause burst from five thousand throats.

When Abe and Miss Harrow were in the buggy again, homeward bound, she asked soberly: "Did you think that you could cow that elephant, Abe, or didn't you care whether he killed you or not?"

"Teacher, I didn't think nothin' at all about it," he answered brightly. "I didn't really know I was goin' till I got there."

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"And were you afraid?"

"Yessum, I was."

"But not enough to keep you from saving that little girl?"

"No'm, not that much."

The fatigue and excitement of the day, added to the sleeplessness of the night before, were telling on him, and he soon began to nod. Miss Harrow steadied him with her arm until he was asleep, and then she drew him to her breast. His cap gradually worked off his head, exposing his tangled brown hair and the tanned forehead beneath. It was not a smooth forehead, as a child's should be, but was already seamed with pain. Miss Harrow suddenly bent down and laid her lips on it.

"Poor, tired, brave little boy!" she murmured. "I don't know whether I have done you good or evil by bringing you to-day."

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### VII

SHORTLY after the circus, Abe, who had always shown a truly quixotic indifference to what is called "getting on in the world," betrayed a puzzling zeal in the matter of earning money. The fame into which he had sprung by his rescue of the bespangled little miss in pink tights at the circus, now stood him in good stead. People who before never had any old paper, rags, or iron to give away to boys, now managed to scrape enough together to fill Abe's little pushcart.

This merchandise he stored in Mr. Barnes's woodshed—it being impossible to haul it up the steep path to his own home—and periodically sold it to the houseboats which were always floating down the river, tying up at every little town for a day or two at a time, and not always acquiring their cargoes, it was suspected, by lawful means. He also ran er-

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rands, did chores, and sold the two quarts of milk which his grandfather allowed him every day.

About this time another plum unexpectedly fell into Abe's basket. A young man named Fletcher had recently bought the *Argus*, the Landing's weekly newspaper, and taken a room at a Mrs. Grimes's. As he spent all his evenings in his room and sat up late, thus burning an unusual amount of fuel, he had amiably volunteered to pay a boy to take care of the stove if Mrs. Grimes would find the boy.

She found Abe, and the very next morning Fletcher, who was not an early riser, was awakened by a *thump-rattle-stump, thump-rattle-stump* on the bare stairway. The noise was quite indescribable, but sounded to him as if some one were rolling a packing-case, containing a flat-iron and a skillet or two, up the stairs to three-four time, with a rest on every other measure.

Presently the odd noise reached the head of the stairs and came down the hall toward Fletcher's room. A moment later his door opened with a jerky, hesitant motion, without

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any preliminary rap, and his astonished eyes rested upon a little bandy-legged cripple, hardly higher than the door knob, hanging between a pair of crutches. One scrawny little hand clutched the bail of a coal-scuttle; the other respectfully held his cap, while a thumb of each hand retained the crosspiece of a crutch.

*Thump*—the rubber tips of the crutches struck the floor. *Rattle*—the coal-scuttle and the twisted little body swung forward together. *Stump*—the slightly inturned foot of the longer leg anchored to the floor. Fletcher's chore boy was inside.

His little, contracted chest was heaving violently, and a livid spot burned on each of his withered cheeks. Breath was at too high a premium with him at that moment to be wasted in a "Good morning," so he merely nodded his head.

Fletcher had a queer feeling in his breast as he rested on his elbow in the bed and realized that this weakling was laboring for him—him who had been a college athlete and weighed one hundred and eighty pounds! He fancied that if he had been a woman he would

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have got up, taken the panting little creature in his arms, and cried a bit. Yet the deepset, gray eyes in the shrewd, prematurely old face were fixed upon him with almost hostile intensity, as if anticipating and resenting this very pity.

"Which side of the stove—will you have—your coal on—boss?" he gasped. "The reason I ast is—one of my customers is—is left-handed—and I thought—I thought you might be, too."

Fletcher assured Abe that he was right-handed, and added: "But I'm afraid you are too small to carry coal up a flight of stairs."

"Your coal is up, ain't it?" asked Abe, in a hard, proud little voice.

It was up, to be sure, but at what cost! Fletcher instantly decided that the child should strain his little heart on no more coal of his, and told him so, tactfully but firmly. Abe heard him through; then without a word he pivoted upon his crutches and swung out of the room.

"Come back!" called Fletcher. "I want to talk with you further and pay you for what you have done."



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"No charge for sample work!" answered Abe, without a halt.

He moved swiftly, and by the time Fletcher had leaped from the bed and reached the head of the stairs, resolved to bring the little elf back, willing or unwilling, he caught only a vanishing glimpse below of a misshapen little body flying down the hall.

A week passed before Fletcher saw or heard anything more of his erstwhile chore boy. But one morning, as he was passing the Boatmen's House, his attention was caught by the sound of a fiddle in the barroom, followed by a volley of laughter and applause. Out of curiosity, prompted by reportorial instinct, he stepped inside. The place was full of men—farmers, wharf-hands, and loafers—leaning against the bar and lining the walls.

The fiddler straddled a whisky barrel, but all eyes were fastened upon an object which Fletcher at once recognized as little Abe. He was in the midst of a grotesque performance called a dance. Jumping from side to side, and spinning dizzily round and round, he doubled and twisted his deformed body with amazing suppleness, all the while progressing

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down the line of delighted spectators on one side, and up on the other side, miraculously avoiding the yawning cuspidors which beset his path, and beating time on the floor with his crutches, for which purpose he had evidently unscrewed their rubber tips.

After the performance he sank down upon a beer keg, with flushed cheeks and heaving chest, but smiling face; while a big ex-steam-boat mate, with a record of having killed three negro roustabouts, passed the hat. Very few failed to contribute something, for the mate had an embarrassing way of pausing before each one until a coin of some kind were forthcoming. Abe received the collection with dignity, and touched his cap in acknowledgment. Then the crowd, inexpressibly dry after this long interval between drinks, moved to the bar as one man. But before anyone drank, Abe was served with an ice-cold lemonade and a straw.

Fletcher made no attempt to talk to the boy at this inauspicious time. But occasion soon offered, for as he repassed the Boatmen's House, an hour later, a chorus of shouts from a group of youngsters playing about the side

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door of the hotel attracted his attention. As he glanced up, he saw the group spreading like a covey of flushed quail, and the next instant a crutch came flying out the door. One little imp daringly turned back to capture the weapon, whereupon Abe shot out and pounced upon his tormentor like a sparrow hawk, and nothing but sheer good luck saved the venturesome urchin a broken head from the other crutch.

As the boys fled, Fletcher advanced. Abe's thin face was angry red, his blue eyes shot out a wicked flame, and his sensitive lips trembled.

"Don't let them tease you, Abe," said Fletcher cheerfully.

"You don't suppose I care for them—for them—*skunks*, do you?" asked Abe bitterly.

But of course he did care, as anyone could see. His little heart was cruelly bruised; and the childish bosom, which should have known only sweetness, was surcharged with hate. Yet when a farewell hoot came back from the boys, Abe received it with the stoicism of an Indian.

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Fletcher induced the boy to accompany him to the *Argus* office. Since he could not conscientiously let Abe carry his coal, he wanted to give him some other employment. So it was agreed that the boy should put in his spare time on Saturdays in copying certain articles from an encyclopedia, for which copies Fletcher had—so he avowed—a very important use.

But such writing! As Fletcher glanced at the great, sprawling, unsymmetrical characters, wandering first above and then below the line, reeling like a drunken man, and punctuated with blots and smears, he would sometimes smile, and sometimes blink rapidly.

In spite of this ready sympathy, though, he was a month in making a breach in Abe's wall of reserve, or getting anything like an expression of confidence from him. But after that it was a pleasant sight to the philanthropic and reflective young editor to see Abe perched upon his stool, bending over a big volume, and plodding patiently through the polysyllabic words, letter by letter, disdaining to ask for help. His face, so pathetically precocious

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at times, would be all aglow with pride over the importance of his task—so much above carrying coal and emptying ashes, or even dancing in the saloon. Especially proud was he when some of the boys would gather outside the window and peek in with envious eyes.

But one day he startled the editor.

“Mr. Fletcher,” said he, pausing in his copying, “you ain’t givin’ me this work out of charity, are you?”

“I should say not,” answered Fletcher, who had views of his own concerning the recording angel’s method of keeping books.

“Because I don’t take no charity,” said Abe simply. “I don’t have to, you know.”

Thus by degrees was Fletcher admitted into that small and select circle comprising Abe’s friends. But Mr. Barnes still stood ahead of the editor, and one afternoon in the following April the boy hobbled into the minister’s study with a buckskin bag, evidently containing something heavy, swinging from the cross-piece of his crutch.

“Mr. Barnes,” he began, with a note of



“So much above carrying coal and emptying ashes.”

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pride, "I've got my pile here in this bag, and I want you to count it for me, please."

The minister was more than astonished at the size of the "pile" when it was displayed on the table and proved to contain something over a hundred dollars.

"That's a pretty good pile, ain't it, Mr. Barnes, for a boy?" asked Abe modestly, but with an undertone of triumph which he would have had to be more than human to conceal. "I been keepin' it in the barn. But that ain't business. It might burn down. Would you keep it for me, Mr. Barnes?"

"The safest place would be the bank, Abe," said Barnes. "That's where I keep mine—when I have any to keep," he added facetiously.

"I guess you got plenty, or you wouldn't have so many books and pictures," observed Abe. "But how about the bank bustin'? Banks do bust sometimes, don't they?"

"Yes, but not as often as barns and houses burn down."

Abe's distrust of banks proved not deep-seated, and after a little parley man and boy walked down to the bank together to deposit



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the money. Abe tucked the pass-book into an upper, outside pocket, from which it protruded an inch or two, so that to see it he had only to drop his eyes; and for a week afterward, whenever he was alone, he would draw the book out and gaze with a kind of fascination at the neat figures which represented his "pile."

Mr. Barnes's astonishment at the amount of Abe's accumulations was somewhat modified by a thing he heard a few days later, and the next time that the boy passed the parsonage the minister called him in.

"Abe," said he, "I am glad to see you coming to Sunday-school so regularly, and to get such good reports from Miss Harrow. But I heard something about you yesterday which gave me pain. Is it true that you are in the habit of dancing in the Boatmen's House bar?"

"Yes, sir," answered the lad promptly.

"I wish you wouldn't do it any more."

"Why, what harm is there in that?" asked Abe in astonishment.

"The evil associations, for one thing. The men you meet there are rough and unclean.

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They will familiarize you with oaths and obscene speech. They will teach you to hold women in light regard. Now the man who doesn't care for good women is not a good man. The very greatest men, the heroes of history, have always loved good women. Not only that, they have tried to be like them in tenderness and delicacy. Christ Himself was as gentle as a woman."

"You don't call Christ a hero, do you?" demanded Abe incredulously.

"I certainly do—the greatest hero of them all."

"I never thought much of Him in some ways," answered the boy simply. "But they might have lied about Him at Sunday-school," he added judicially.

"What did you hear about Christ in Sunday-school that made you think less of Him?" asked the minister.

"Well, His takin' water every time, for one thing, and puttin' back that feller's ear after Peter cut it off. If a boy slugs me, I'll slug him back, just like you or any other man would. But look at Christ when they come to crucify Him! He just let 'em do it," he ex-

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claimed with flashing eyes, "when He was able to call all them angels down with swords and wipe out the whole gang. That allus kind of killed Christ fur me."

The minister explained the significance of Christ's conduct on the occasion in question as well as he could, and then reverted to Abe's dancing in the Boatmen's bar. The child listened attentively.

"Mr. Barnes," said he impressively, when the minister closed by again asking him to give the dancing up, "do you know that I sometimes take in as much as two dollars there in one day?"

"I don't doubt it, and that is a great deal of money for a boy to make. The question, though, is not what you make but *how* you make it. A penny got honestly is better than a dollar got dishonestly. I don't say that you got yours dishonestly, but I do think the method very questionable, and one that no Sunday-school scholar could consistently resort to."

Abe was silent for a moment. "If I was savin' money just to be savin' it, I'd quit dancin' in a minute. But I'm savin' it for

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something that nobody don't know anything about, and never could guess 'less I told them."

"Would you mind telling me?" asked Mr. Barnes with a glance at the illuminated face. "Maybe I could be of help in deciding the question for you."

Abe regarded his friend doubtfully for a moment. But the minister had never yet played him false.

"Will you crisscross your heart and swear never to tell?"

"Yes."

"And will you promise not to laugh?"

"That's unnecessary, Abe. You know that I never laugh at you."

The boy hesitated a moment longer.

"Mr. Barnes, I never expected to tell a human soul this, but I'm savin' that money to go to a doctor in the city and be straightened out, so I kin be Miss Harrow's husband when I grow up!"

A profound silence fell over the study, punctuated sharply by the ticking of the little clock on the minister's table. Abe fastened his gleaming eyes on his interlocutor with the soul-searching, unescapable gravity of child-

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hood. The man, puzzled as to his course, toyed with a paper weight to gain time. Also to give the lump in his throat an opportunity to subside.

"To marry a pure, sweet woman like Miss Harrow, Abe, is a great ambition—one of the greatest that any man could have," said he at last. "It does you honor, and you have my heartiest sympathy. Yet," and he paused impressively, "what do you suppose *she* would think of your dancing in a saloon for money to be used for that purpose?"

The child suddenly turned pale.

"Do you suppose she wouldn't marry me if she knowed I got straightened by money I earned there?" he asked huskily.

"No, I don't think that," the minister hastened to reply; "because she would know that you had done it ignorantly. But I think she would be ever so much happier if she knew you had earned the money in some other way."

"Mr. Barnes, I'll never dance in that saloon again as long as I live!" cried the boy. "And if I knowed just how much I'd earned there, I'd draw it out of the bank and throw it in the river."

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“Don't do that by any means,” cautioned the minister, for he knew the child's quixotic character too well to regard this as an idle boast. “Keep what you have, though it came from a bad source, and try to see that it is spent for a good end.”

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### VIII

AN event destined to exert great influence on Abe's future was, all unknown to him, taking shape at this time. The *Brazil Weekly Enterprise*, in order to advertise itself, had offered a very fine piano to the most popular young woman in the county. The delicate point was to be determined by ballot; each ballot was to cost one cent; and anybody who cast one hundred and fifty ballots was entitled to the paper for one year.

The contest was taken small notice of at first in Angel's Landing, owing to the unlikeliness of any of its girls conducting a successful campaign against the larger towns in the county, especially Brazil itself, which was a place of five thousand inhabitants. But one day old Akron Holmes, who dropped into the *Argus* office every Saturday to read its exchanges, observed to Abe:

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"Abie, why don't you strike out and git that *Enterprise* pianner for your teacher? Seems to me I would if I had a teacher as nice as your'n."

He cocked his feet on the desk and winked at Fletcher through his grimy, old-fashioned split lenses. But Abe, who did not see the wink, and could not, moreover, conceive of anybody joking in connection with Miss Harrow, took the suggestion seriously. Three days later he was out soliciting votes, with a little book of blank ballots peeping from his upper, outside pocket, alongside his pass-book at the bank.

Mr. Fletcher, to the petrefaction of Abe, who did not suspect how often his friend bent his steps of an evening toward Miss Harrow's boarding-house, started the enterprise with one hundred votes. Mr. Barnes, though doubtful of the wisdom of raising the boy's hopes, and with no dollars to throw away, followed the pace set by the editor. The third person whom Abe approached was his grandfather.

"You don't expect everybody to give a dollar, like them two, do you?" he asked.



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"No, sir. I don't expect some people to give me more than one vote, and they only cost a penny. I'll be satisfied with anything."

"That's the way to talk," returned the old man, well pleased; and putting on his glasses he read, with habitual caution, the conditions of the contest printed on the back of the ballot. "Beggars mustn't be choosers. Besides, some people can't afford to give much more than a penny; others will think the whole dum thing nonsense; still others will think you ain't got any show of winning; and a few will be just plain stingy. I'll give you fifty cents, my boy."

"Thank you!" exclaimed Abe, who, from his grandfather's speech, had lowered his hopes to a dime. "Would you ask any women for votes, grandpa?"

"Why not?"

"Ain't they mostly stingy?"

"Well, I wouldn't say just that. They're middlin' close at times, compared with men. Most of 'em don't have much spare change, I reckon."

"Baldy Patterson says women are always

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stingy except when they're spendin' money for hats and clothes for theirselves."

"Some of 'em. Most of 'em, mebbe. But not all. You know that Miss Harrow ain't that way, don't you, after all those things she bought you at the circus?"

"Yes, sir," answered the lad, with lighting eyes. "But she's different from most of 'em. Would you ask Mrs. Derricks?"

"Yes."

Abe did so, and Mrs. Derricks promptly responded with twenty-five cents, which Abe regarded as generous, considering that she earned only two dollars a week in addition to her board. As she fumbled in her pocketbook with her work-worn fingers, the boy, with his precocious wisdom, sensed something of her forlornness, living up there on the hill, husbandless and childless, with two persons who were apt to forget her very existence except at meal time.

"I'm much obliged, Mrs. Derricks," said he, with a gentleness which he too rarely employed toward her. "If you had a daughter, and she lived here with us, maybe I'd be git-  
tin' votes for her instead of Miss Harrow."

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"I reckon you would, Abie—if you liked her."

"Oh, I'd like her," he protested, but in his heart he had his doubts.

With his usual feverish energy when once launched upon a project, he began a systematic canvass of the village. Every store and every house, even the shanty of Red Maginnis's mother, sooner or later heard the soft thump of his rubber-tipped crutches. His appeal was quite artless; just: "I'm tryin' to git my teacher a piano. The votes cost a cent apiece. How many will you take?"

But, backed by his earnest face and expectant gray eyes, it was seldom made in vain. And when, tucking his crutches more securely into his arm-pits, one thin hand went up to his coat pocket for the book of ballots and the other went down into his trousers for his stub of a lead pencil, and he said gravely, "Just sign your name here, sir, and the number of votes you want to buy in that corner," many a man who had been fishing in his pocket for a dime brought out a quarter or half-dollar instead.

Only one house did Abe fail to visit, and

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that was the largest and most promising one in the village. Moreover, though he repeatedly hobbled by it on his rounds, he never so much as gave it a glance. Mrs. Townsend the owner had once expressed to some callers her doubts of the wholesomeness of Abe's influence over her son Charlie. Charlie chanced to overhear the observation, and the next time he and Abe had a quarrel he flung his eavesdroppings at the latter.

Neither of the children really understood the import of the remark further than that it was uncomplimentary. But from that moment, though he and Charlie were playing together as usual the next day, Abe was a sworn enemy of Mrs. Townsend. He wondered at times, when he sat dreaming on his favorite rock, if it would not be a fine thing, worthy of the blood of his piratical great-great-grandfather, for him to burn her house about her ears, and then heroically rescue her from the flames at the last moment. Actually, of course, he was as far from incendiarism as the most lamblike boy in the village.

But one day as he was passing the house, Mrs. Townsend unexpectedly hailed him from

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her veranda and asked him to come in a moment. He hesitated, and then passed slowly up the walk with a pale face. He suspected, in spite of her pleasant tone, that her designs were hostile. But he was not afraid, and should she assail him with either tongue or hand he was prepared to defend himself vigorously.

"Abe, I understand that you are trying to get a piano for Miss Harrow," began Mrs. Townsend, after he had refused to sit down.

"Yessum." His heart lightened, but his stoical face gave no sign of it.

"I hear that you have called on nearly everybody in town for votes. How does it happen that you haven't been to me, when you pass here so often?"

"I'm only callin' on my friends, mostly," he answered, in a low voice, looking at the ground.

"Don't you consider me your friend?" she asked, with amused eyes.

"No'm."

"Why not?"

"Because you told Charlie something about me once." His voice was now hard as flint.

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"Why, I am quite sure that I didn't!" she exclaimed.

"You told some women and he heard you."

"I think you must be mistaken, Abe—or Charlie was, if he told you that." The incident had passed from her mind. "I assure you that I have only the most kindly feelings for you, and I should be glad to help you get your piano. Will you accept fifty cents from me?"

He stared steadily at a bare patch of ground where an ant was tugging furiously at a dead fly.

"I reckon I would," he answered, reluctantly.

His obduracy nettled Mrs. Townsend.

"It's nothing to me, you understand. I don't want you to think I am trying to buy your good will. If you would rather not accept the money, say so."

"I believe I'd ruther not," said he, flushing, without looking up.

"Very well, then," said she. "You are merely depriving your teacher of fifty votes."

He passed slowly down the walk to the gate

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again; and proceeded up the street even more slowly, after getting out of Mrs. Townsend's sight. The joy had gone out of him. He was on his way to a farmhouse, just outside the village limits, where he had been promised some votes. But at a convenient grassy bank he sat down and decided to postpone his visit to another day. At that moment he had no heart for even this cherished undertaking.

It was not the loss of fifty votes which disturbed him, even taking the view that the loss was really Miss Harrow's and not his. The truth was, he instinctively felt that he had done wrong. He had refused the olive branch of peace—although he had never heard of that particular botanical species—and an innate sense of justice was struggling to the surface of the turbid pool of his knowledge of right and wrong.

Every night in the secrecy of his room, with Watch at his side, he would take out his book and with infinite pains cast up the results of the day's work. It was a task in which he reveled, even when the votes he had got were few, for they went to swell what was beginning to be a respectable grand total. But this night,

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though the day had been an unusually good one, there was no pleasure in the summing up for him. He went to bed with a heavy heart, and tossed restlessly for an hour or more—a long time for a little boy.

He always slept with his coat hanging over a chair close by his bed, so that he could reach out and touch his pass-book and ballot-book any time that he chanced to wake up, just as he had done with his crutches when they were new. Their presence always helped him to go to sleep again. The next morning after the Townsend incident he awoke with a smile at sight of the cherished objects. But a moment later the leaden weight of yesterday's occurrence, mercifully lifted for the night, was pressing on his heart again. He was unusually taciturn at the breakfast table, and hastened off to school immediately afterward, an hour before time. When he reached the Townsend home, he turned in and rang the front door-bell.

"Mrs. Townsend," he began hurriedly, "if you say you didn't say that about me, what Charlie told me, I'll be glad to take your money."



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To his surprise and dismay she hesitated.

"Abe, after you left yesterday, I thought the matter over carefully, and I believe I did say something about you once to a visitor. But I am sure that I didn't mean any harm by it. Besides, my opinion of you has changed considerably since that time, and—I am very sorry that I should have been so thoughtless and hasty."

"If you take it back, it's all right, Mrs. Townsend," said he magnanimously. "We boys never fight about a thing that's took back."

"I do take it back, every word of it," said she heartily.

She excused herself to get her purse, and when she came back she handed him a dollar instead of fifty cents.

It was a very different boy who passed down the walk this day, and he entered the schoolhouse with such a shining face that Isabel Harrow for the first time thought him almost handsome.

He had as yet said nothing to her about the great enterprise which he had under way in her behalf, and she had respected his whim by

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saying nothing to him. But an almost painful tenderness would surge up in her breast when she reflected on the disappointment and defeat which he was almost certainly doomed to suffer. There were so many contestants. Two of her acquaintances in Brazil, in fact, were among them; and they had a circle of friends which was almost a guarantee of the success of one or the other. She had, therefore, spoken to Fletcher about the matter, and urged him to divert the boy in some way. But Fletcher had only smilingly shaken his head. "There are some things, I have observed, that you can't divert," quoth he, with editorial wisdom. "Love is one of them."

Each week the *Enterprise* published a list of the contestants, together with the votes to their credit. The first issue after Abe had gone to work contained no mention of Miss Harrow, to his disappointment. But on the next Saturday morning he was at the post-office, with the key to the *Argus's* box in his hand, an hour before the stage arrived. He eagerly scanned the titles of the various exchanges as they were tossed into the box, and as soon as the *Enterprise* appeared he seized it and swung

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rapidly down the street between his crutches for the *Argus* office. Fletcher, with a smile, turned to the all-important page. The length of the list was disheartening, and it was still more so to find that Miss Harrow stood twenty-fifth from the top.

"On the face of it the outlook isn't flattering, Abe, I must confess," observed the editor. "But let's figure a little. In the first place, the contest doesn't close for five weeks. It's anybody's fight yet. In the second place, those girls at the top of the list have probably got in about all the votes there are in sight for them. At least, they've skimmed the cream off their pan of milk. Thirdly, most of those below the top will get discouraged and quit—which is just what *you* mustn't do. Now your teacher has three thousand votes. Miss Hamilton, who heads the list, has eighty-five hundred. That means that you've got to raise fifty-five dollars to tie her. I think I know where you can get it."

"Where?" demanded Abe breathlessly.

"On the steamboats and from the gang that hangs out at the Boatmen's bar."

"Mr. Barnes told me I mustn't go in the

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saloon any more, and I promised not to," answered Abe dejectedly.

"Oh, you did! Well, you needn't go in. You can wait outside the door and catch the fellows as they come and go. Moreover, you must drop into the hotel office every morning on your way to school and strike every drummer you see."

That afternoon, after a hasty dinner, Abe hurried down the rocks to the Boatmen's House. He arrived in time to catch two traveling salesmen who were waiting for a down-river boat. Both of them, after chaffing Abe a little, took a liberal number of votes. He then accompanied them to the wharf and they promised to assist him in holding up everybody on board the *Rocket*. Being only a local packet she carried few passengers; nevertheless, when the boy hurried ashore at the sound of the warning bell, he exultingly jingled in his pocket over two dollars in dimes, quarters, and halves.

He next stationed himself at the door of the Boatmen's bar, though not without some qualms of conscience. The first man who came out was "Baldy" Patterson, a big Irish-

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man who had formerly been a steamboat mate, but who had finally lost all standing on the river through his intemperance. He now smelt strong of whisky, as usual.

"Hello, Absey!" he sang out fraternally. "Don't see you around with the boys no more, Absey."

"I don't go in saloons no more, Baldy," said Abe soberly. "I'm gittin' votes for a piano for my teacher. Would you like to take some?"

"Would I?" exclaimed the ex-mate, slowly spelling out one of the ballots. "I should say I would. I'm a little short of coin myself to-day, Abe; but there's a gang of the boys inside with plenty and all feelin' pretty good. Come in with me, and I'll guarantee you ten dollars."

The boy hesitated. He had not really promised to keep out of the saloon, but only not to dance there. Yet he instinctively felt that to go inside would break the spirit if not the letter of his promise, and would be almost as offensive to Miss Harrow as if he had danced there.

"I can't go inside, Baldy," he confessed

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shamefacedly. "I—I promised somebody I wouldn't." He lacked the hardihood to mention either the preacher or his teacher, for it was precisely religion and women which were Baldy's chief themes of ridicule.

"Well, it won't do you no harm to stay outside," declared the Irishman. "'Taint everybody kin drink moderate like me. Give me the papers and I'll risk the damnation."

Abe turned over his book and bit of pencil and explained how the ballots were to be made out—not a complicated process, but one which the befogged Patterson was some time in grasping. Then, with lively anticipations, the boy sat down on the step to wait. He hoped Mr. Barnes might not happen along, but he would not cross the street or go next door. That would be skulking.

Patterson was gone a long time—half an hour or more—and when he finally came out he was more redolent than ever of whisky, and walked a bit unsteadily. However, he had made good his promise.

"There, Absey," said he boastfully, handing Abe a ten-dollar bill and some change, "that's what a man can do who has friends,

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even if he ain't got money. Give my compliments to your teacher, and tell her that Baldy Patterson ain't so small as to let his prejudices against the sex blind him to the virtues of the individual." With which he moved uncertainly away.

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### IX

A FEW days later, as Abe was conning his spelling lesson, the *St. Lawrence's* musical whistle floated tremulously in at the school-house window. The great side-wheeler, claiming the full length of the Ohio as her own, plied between Pittsburg and Cairo, and, of course, never deigned to stop at an insignificant place like Angel's Landing. Consequently, she was one of the boats which the imaginative child had invested with a particularly bright halo of mystery and romance. To study with her in sight was impossible, so he closed his book until she should have passed by and disappeared around the bend below.

Her decks, as usual, were black with passengers; a band was playing; pennants were rippling at stem and stern; and two great flags were billowing majestically from the staffs just back of the pilot-house. Abe's eyes



## THE LITTLE KING

grew dreamy at the sight, and he was rapidly passing from the real world about him to the fairy world of his fancy, when he suddenly started in his seat—so violently that he dropped his book to the floor. The *St. Lawrence* had swerved from her arrowlike course, and was swinging in a great, foamy curve for the shore!

Quivering with excitement, Abe seized his crutches and hastened up the aisle to the teacher's desk, in spite of the fact that the first geography class was in the midst of a recitation.

"Miss Harrow, the *St. Lawrence* is landin'!" he whispered eagerly. "Please could I be excused?"

"Is the matter urgent?" she asked, though surmising his purpose.

"Yessum."

"Then you may go," she added, with a smile.

After feeling in his pocket to make sure that he had his book of ballots, he started off at a speed which threatened to rack his ill-jointed body to pieces. The boat, in all probability, would merely touch at the wharf with-

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out throwing out a line, as he had known big boats to do a few times before, in order to drop some passenger who had paid well for the unusual concession. In this case he would scarcely get to the wharf before she backed out. But if by any chance she should have a special consignment of freight to put off, he would have an unparalleled opportunity to solicit votes—provided the captain would let him go aboard. These big through boats were stricter about such matters than the little ones, he knew.

The *St. Lawrence* had hardly bumped the wharf, in a marvelously gentle way for so huge a craft, when those passengers who had turned from their books, cards, and cool drinks to observe the quaint hamlet under the frowning bluff, saw a grotesque little figure between crutches come flying down the graveled declivity toward them. He ascended the bridge to the wharf with unabated speed, encouraged by the groaning of a hawser which indicated that the boat was tying up.

Yet in the center of the dim, ill-smelling warehouse, littered with packing-cases, farm machinery, chicken coops, and sacks of fer-

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tilizer, he suddenly froze in his tracks at sight of two men. One was just an ordinary man. The other was tall, broad-shouldered, deep-chested, dressed in blue, with a double row of brass buttons down the front of his coat. He wore an iron-gray mustache, and iron-gray hair curled about the edge of a blue cap which was heavy with gold cord and bore a legend familiar to every boy in Angel's Landing, even before he knew his letters.

It was the captain of the *St. Lawrence*! Precious as the moments were, Abe stood and stared as one stands and stares at royalty. He had seen steamboat captains before, of course; he had even spoken to them—timidly and with misgivings. But they had belonged to the little packets regularly stopping at Angel's Landing; their uniforms were often shabby, and their waistcoats streaked with gravy; and the boy had never thought of them as belonging to the same order of men as this splendid, immaculate specimen.

The two gentlemen paused at the door, and Abe listened with all his being as the god in blue extended his arm, pointed to the shore, and opened his lips to speak.

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"I never pass this little place," Abe heard him say, "without thinking of that terrible night. She blew up in midstream, two minutes after I had passed through the boiler room and inspected the steam gauges."

"I should think an experience of that kind would mark a man for life," observed the other gentleman.

"It marked me," answered the officer, soberly. "To this day the sudden blowing off of steam makes me start."

Abe had stood breathless from the first word. Then, with the blood humming in his ears, he suddenly stepped forward—almost against his will.

"Do you mean the *Flora MacDonald*, sir?" he asked, in the high, piping key of excitement.

The captain smiled down upon the diminutive figure.

"Even the children here know the story, you see," he murmured to his companion. Then to Abe: "I do, my boy. What do you know about her?"

"I know all about her. I was *on* her!" fairly shouted Abe.

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The captain smiled incredulously.

"I was, sir!" repeated the boy eagerly. "I was a little baby, and got blowed up on the *Flora MacDonald*, and that's how I'm so crooked."

The big man in blue ceased his smiling.

"There *was* a baby blown to the shore," he observed to the other gentleman. "Moreover, miracle though it seems, it lived. It was found by a man named—What is your name, son?" he asked, as if to test the boy's veracity.

"Abe Hathaway. And Aaron Hathaway is the man that found me."

"That's right!" exclaimed the captain. "This is a seven days' wonder, Milton. I have always said that if I ever ran across that little passenger of mine again, I should give him my compliments." He slipped his fingers into his waistcoat pocket, and brought out a five-dollar bill.

But the boy shrank from the proffered money.

"I—I don't take charity," he said.

"Of course you don't. This isn't charity. This is a present."

"I'd ruther not take it," persisted Abe.

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"But I'm gittin' votes for a piano for my teacher, and that money will buy five hundred votes, and I'll take it for that, if you want to give it. I come down here to ask to go on your boat and git votes from the passengers. You kin look at my ballot book. It'll tell you all about it."

The captain examined the book with a smile, and asked Abe a few more questions.

"Come with me," said he, with a knowing glance at his companion. "We're laid up here for an hour with a broken pitman, and I shouldn't be surprised if we got quite a few votes for that piano before we're through."

Walking between the two gentlemen, and breathing very fast, Abe crossed the spotless forecastle of the vessel and climbed a winding companionway with glistening brass hand-rails as thick as his leg. When they had reached the upper deck and stood in the midst of the crowd of passengers, the captain unexpectedly seized Abe by the waist and hoisted him to a table. The next instant two hundred pairs of curious eyes were leveled in that direction. Abe was a little frightened over his sudden prominence, but he set his lips firmly.

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He would not have escaped if he could, for he knew that his ordeal meant votes for his beloved teacher.

"Ladies and gentlemen," began Captain Rhodes, in a voice which instantly commanded attention, "while we are waiting I am going to tell you a story. It's a good story in itself, but the best thing about it is that every word is true. Nine years ago, within a hundred yards of where you are now sitting, a great catastrophe occurred. The *Flora MacDonald*, whose first officer I had the honor to be, exploded her whole battery of boilers without warning, and leveled the vessel to the water's edge in an instant of time. I shall not attempt to describe the scene of horror that followed—the mutilated dead, the shrieks of the dying, and the frenzied struggles of the few survivors out there in the middle of the river, enveloped in pitchy darkness. It is sufficient to say that out of a list of one hundred and eighty only thirty-three were saved.

"There were many marvelous escapes. One of the stokers, for instance, whose head was within three feet of an exploding boiler, was unhurt. The pilot was shot many feet

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straight up in the air, and came down in a tangle of débris; yet he got off with a broken leg, and is to-day steering a boat. But the most incredible escape of all was that of a babe—a tender babe, scarcely a year old, which was actually blown to the shore, a distance of some three hundred feet, and landed in the top of a clump of willows. It was not found until seven hours later, when its crying attracted a passer-by. The doctors merely glanced at it when it was brought to them for examination, pronounced it practically dead already, and turned to victims whom there was some hope of saving. But the man who found the babe—a farmer whose house you can see there on the bluff—was not satisfied. He carried the little fellow home with him, gave it the tenderest care, and finally fanned the tiny spark of life into a flame.

“To make a long story short, the babe lived, though crippled for life. Now you have already guessed that that babe is this boy,” slipping his arm about Abe's waist. “None of the survivors could identify him. Every effort was made by the owners of the *Flora MacDonald* to find some of his relatives, but



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the advertisements brought no response. So to-day you see before you, crippled most sadly, a little boy whose father and mother are probably dead, buried in a watery grave, without ritual or prayer, or an instant's time in which to prepare for their long journey into eternity. Yet it is possible that they were not on that ill-fated boat, and are living somewhere in this great country of ours to-day, still mourning the loss of their child, and not knowing whether he is alive or dead—a grief harder to bear, any of you parents will agree, than if they certainly knew his fate.”

He paused as his voice took a husky turn, and a dozen handkerchiefs went up to as many ladies' eyes. Abe, pale and motionless, steadily gazed at the gold cord on the captain's cap.

“Now I brought this little boy up here to tell you that he is soliciting votes for his school-teacher. Her little schoolhouse stands yonder in plain sight. If he gets enough votes she will receive a fine piano. He has worked hard, and has secured a great many votes already. But as the whole county is engaged in the contest, the odds against him are heavy. Therefore any of you who wish

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to exercise that right so precious to every American citizen—the right to vote,” he concluded, with a smile, “now have the opportunity of a lifetime, at the very low price of one cent a ballot. If you elect your candidate, I guarantee that you will never regret it.”

For an instant there was silence. Then——

“Put me down for a thousand, my boy!” called a gentleman who held a little girl on his knees, and whose wife was wiping her eyes.

“A thousand for me also!” added the captain gayly.

“And another thousand for me,” said the gentleman whom Abe had first seen with the captain.

The next twenty minutes were the busiest of Abe's life. He did not have to leave the table; in fact, with the press about him, to leave would have been impossible. Many merely tendered their money—sometimes five dollars, sometimes a dollar, sometimes only half a dollar—and waived the matter of receiving credit. But Abe, in spite of the rush of business, punctiliously insisted on each one signing his ballot; and the abbreviated lead pencil which he carried had to be sharpened over and

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over again, until there was scarcely enough left to be held between thumb and finger.

When the boy finally went ashore, followed by a chorus of adieus, his trouser pockets were fairly sagging under their weight of silver, and only two blank ballots remained in his book. He had not the haziest idea how much he had taken in, and he was burning to find out. So he swiftly crossed the wharf and passed up the long graveled slope at unwonted speed.

Scores of eyes followed his course; and when he paused at the top of the bank to catch a little breath and take a final glance at the beautiful boat, a perfect cloud of handkerchiefs burst upon his startled view. Thrilling with pride and happiness, he waved his cap in return, again and again, until the pilot, quietly smoking in his lofty house on top the texas, mischievously pulled the whistle cord. A jet of steam leaped from the compound whistle, and the next instant the *St. Lawrence's* melodious diapason echoed tremblingly from bluff to bluff, and finally died away in the bend of the river below. Abe fairly reeled, and the chills rippled up and down his spine.

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When he entered the *Argus* office he tried to be calm. Mr. Fletcher, whom he admired immensely, was always calm. But the thing was impossible to-day; and abandoning himself to his excitement, with blazing eyes and quivering body, he poured forth a rapid, half-incoherent account of his adventure.

"By Jupiter, Abe!" exclaimed the young editor, lighting his corncob pipe. "There's a story in that to make the *Enterprise's* mouth water, and if they publish it, it will bring you many a vote. But show your coin! When I see that I'll know you haven't had a vision."

Abe emptied his pockets on the table, and even Fletcher's imperturbable gray eyes glowed as handful after handful came out. Then he counted the money while Abe shifted from one crutch to the other until finally, from sheer weakness, he had to sit down.

"Seventy-nine dollars and fifty cents!" announced Fletcher; and with a yelp such as had not escaped him since his college days he held out a congratulatory hand.

"Are you sure it's that much?" demanded the boy, in a startled tone.

"As sure as death."

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For a moment the child blinked rapidly; he hated to cry before Fletcher, and he tried to smile through the rising tears. Then, giving up, he dropped his crutches to the floor with a clatter, and laying his head upon the table began to sob.

The wise editor said nothing for some time; but finally he observed, as if to himself:

“Different people have different ways of showing their joy. Now *I* always laugh when I’m happy.”

Abe lifted his tear-stained face.

“I do, too, Mr. Fletcher, mostly. But so many people cried on the boat, and they was so good to me I just felt as if I’d like to *kiss* ’em all.”

“More especially the ladies, I take it. Why didn’t you do it? It’s quite evident that you could have had whatever you wanted from that crowd.”

The *Enterprise*, confirming Fletcher’s journalistic instinct, promptly accepted the two-column story about Abe and the *St. Lawrence*, and willingly paid the price of ten dollars in the form stipulated by the writer—namely,

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one thousand votes to be credited to Isabel Harrow. The paper also asked for a photograph of Abe, and for the first time in his life he sat before a camera, looking desperately self-conscious.

The picture as reproduced by the *Enterprise* was by no means a work of art. Insufficient impression and cheap printing paper gave Abe's face the pitted appearance of a victim of smallpox. Yet it was a proud moment for the lad as he gazed at it with fascinated eyes for fully five minutes, and then sat down to hear Fletcher read the "story."

As a journalist—he had once reported for a St. Louis daily—Fletcher had been taught never to sacrifice a dramatic situation because it did not chance to square with the truth. It was therefore a very highly colored and idealized, not to say sensationalized, account of his life, his relations with Miss Harrow, and his doings on the *St. Lawrence*, to which Abe listened.

"Well, what do you think of it, Abe?" asked the editor, with a touch of pride, as he tossed the paper to the table and reached for his pipe.

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"It's fine, Mr. Fletcher. I wisht it was true."

"It *is* true—in spirit," protested Fletcher.

Abe shook his head.

"I ain't no hero. No boy with crutches could be a hero."

"Let me assure you, Abe," observed Fletcher, with more earnestness than he usually betrayed, "that I don't agree with you. Let me assure you that crutches have nothing whatever to do with heroism. Moreover, there is a certain young lady in this town who exactly agrees with me on that question, and who doesn't like to hear you run yourself down just because you happen to be a cripple."

Abe's eyes lighted.

"She didn't *say* so!"

"Yes she did—more than once."

The boy became silent. Fletcher, glancing at him occasionally out of the corner of his eye, complacently smoked.

"Don't you think, honestly, Mr. Fletcher, that she'd like me a *little* better if I was straight?"

"Honestly, I don't. I don't believe she'd

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like you as well. I mean it! A woman never loves a man for his body. She may admire him for it, but she never loves him for it."

Abe made no reply. He could not quite believe the editor's words, but they trickled through his consciousness like some sweet, cooling balm.

A day or two later Fletcher received a letter which he was strictly enjoined to treat as confidential. It was signed by the three girls who stood at the head of the contestants for the piano—all living in Brazil—and it stated that since reading the article in the *Enterprise* the writers had no relish to contend further against the candidate of little Abe Hathaway. It would be expedient for them to leave their names on the list, but they pledged themselves not to solicit another vote.

Miss Harrow's name, when credited with Abe's haul on the *St. Lawrence*, had made a tremendous leap over the heads of fifteen or twenty other candidates. Yet it was still fourth place from the top. In another week, to be sure, outside votes, attracted by the article in the *Enterprise*, might reasonably be



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expected to put her at the head of the list, now that the three candidates above her would remain practically stationary. But No. 5 on the list was only a few hundred votes behind Miss Harrow; and Fletcher, who knew this No. 5, feared a sudden marshaling of reserve forces on her part at the last minute.

The conditions of the contest were eminently favorable to such a strategic move. The polls were not to close until ten o'clock on the last Friday in May; but at six o'clock of that day the ballot-boxes were to be opened, and all the votes cast since the last issue of the *Enterprise* were to be credited to the respective contestants, and the revised list to be posted on a blackboard in the newspaper's office.

By this scheme the canny editor hoped, with reason, to force some spirited fighting between six and ten o'clock, especially among the supporters of the Brazil girls, who would naturally be on hand in force. Contestants living out of town would be likely, unless far in the lead, to be "frozen out" through the impracticability of mustering their friends for the final struggle. But as it had not been ex-

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pected that any one outside of Brazil would make any great showing, old Fritz Christian, the editor, had seen no injustice in the conditions in the beginning, and it was now too late to change them.

Fletcher determined to be on hand on the night of the award, to see that Abe received a square deal. Yet the name next to Isabel's had banished all confidence from his breast. Honoria Hunter's father was a man of means, as clannish as a Scotch Highlander, and notoriously sensitive in the matter of honors he fancied to be due himself or family. It was already town gossip that most of Honoria's support had come from him, and Fletcher feared that when the crucial moment arrived he would go in to win, regardless of cost. Yet as a politician, the editor of the *Argus* still had hopes that some kind of a combination might be effected which would save little Abe from defeat.

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### X

A PARTY of six young men from Angel's Landing, headed by Fletcher, and carrying Abe in one of their buggies, drove over to Brazil the night the contest closed. When they reached there, about eight o'clock, they found an expectant and eager crowd, half of whom were women, packed in and around the *Enterprise* building. In the composing-room the ladies of some church, in neat white aprons, were serving coffee and sandwiches. The employees of the paper, under the generalship of the editor, sat behind a railing which hedged them off from the press, where they smoked, smiled, cracked jokes with their friends outside, and altogether tried to look the important part they were playing. Old Christian himself, a man of elephantine ponderosity, silently sucked his mahogany-brown meerschaum and stared stolidly at the jostling throng out of his little gray eyes.

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But it was the beautiful baby-grand piano, standing in one corner of the inclosure and reflecting every light in the room from its polished walnut case, that caught and fixed Abe's bulging eyes. Its size and grandeur awed him, and interfered with his breathing. He had seen pianos before—one, at least. But it was nothing like this. The presumption of him, Abe Hathaway, in trying to win a magnificent property like this, came over him with a rush and made him sick at heart. Hence, when old Christian suddenly lifted a fat forefinger and beckoned him inside for a closer inspection of the piano, he dejectedly shook his head and would not have gone had Fletcher not pushed him forward. Once inside, close to the majestic thing, he stood for fully five minutes, looking at his face in its mirrorlike surface, breathing the faint odor of polish, and wondering if the ivory on the keys had really come out of an elephant's "tushes," as he had been told. Then, without having laid a finger upon the instrument or stirred from his tracks, he turned as solemnly away as if he had been viewing a casket.

In a conspicuous place stood a big black-

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board containing the contestant's names. Miss Harrow still headed the list and led Miss Hunter by three hundred votes. But as Fletcher studied the sharp, shifty eyes of a dapper little man in a white waistcoat, who tenaciously clung to a position close to the rail, as if to be in short range when the firing should begin, he was morally certain that the relative position of the two leading candidates would soon change, and for once in his happy-go-lucky life he wished that he were rich.

That man was Jason T. Hunter, at once the wealthiest and the most unpopular man in Brazil. Near him stood his wife—a grenadierlike woman of twice his weight, whose eyes already scintillated with triumph. Not far away was their daughter Honoria, a fair-haired, pretty girl, taller than her father. The long white coat which she wore gave her a queenly appearance, and the fingers with which she occasionally drew the collar up to her throat glittered with precious stones. She was a daughter that any father might be proud of, and Fletcher studied her admiringly.

“That letter of withdrawal which I received

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is an open secret here now," he whispered to one of his companions, "and Collins, the *Enterprise* foreman, told me a moment ago it was generally believed that Miss Hunter wanted to join with the other three girls, but that her parents objected."

"I don't doubt it. Too bad we've got to fight such a girl," answered the other.

The delegation from Angel's Landing had been greeted with a few good-natured huzzas, but after this nothing happened for a while. A few scattering votes were recorded from time to time, usually five or ten cents' worth, and simply out of compliment to candidates who had no possible chance of winning. It was like boys exploding firecrackers before a battle; and the big numbers at the top of the board, already in the tens of thousands, remained unchanged.

But at half-past eight o'clock Mr. Hunter buttoned the top button of his faultless sack coat, cleared his throat significantly, and slipped two small white fingers into the pocket of his white waistcoat—girding up his narrow loins, as it were, for the fray.

"One thousand votes for my daughter,"

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said he, in a metallic, emotionless tone, and passed a ten-dollar bill over the rail.

"One thousand for Miss Harrow," said Fletcher promptly, and handed over his ten-dollar bill.

"One thousand more for Honoria," said Hunter again, smoothly and evenly, without so much as glancing at his opponent, but setting his thin lips determinedly.

Following out their plan, one after the other of the six young men from Angel's Landing cast a thousand votes each for Miss Harrow. Each time their opponent nullified their efforts with a thousand votes for his daughter, until he had spent seventy dollars. And still the roll of bills which he drew from his pocket, and rather ostentatiously displayed, was of ominous thickness. Fletcher glanced at his companions.

"He means blood, and we might as well have saved our money," he murmured bitterly. "The best I had hoped to do was to start somebody with a plethoric purse. We've done our duty. To throw good money after bad would be quixotic. He'll have that piano if it costs him a thousand dollars. But if I were

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worth as much as he is," he added vindictively, "I'd either beat him or send him to the poorhouse."

The clerk at the blackboard had been busy with crayon and eraser. After the last change in the figures Miss Hunter led, with 19,000 votes; Miss Harrow followed, with 18,700. The generous trio who had withdrawn still stood next in order; but they now lagged far behind, with only about 11,000 votes each.

In the lull which followed this first skirmish—at the time it looked like the last also—these three young ladies approached Fletcher.

After making themselves known, with some maidenly confusion over their own boldness, they asked to be introduced to the little cripple about whom they had heard so much.

"We want to tell him how sorry we are," added the spokesman.

Fletcher turned for Abe, who had been excitedly hugging his elbow for the last fifteen minutes; but the lad was now nowhere in sight. He had, in fact, slipped outside. He did not stop until he was beyond the outermost fringe of people; then, creeping into a dark stairway,



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he dropped down on the dirty steps and began to cry. The piano was lost; all his labor had been in vain; his triumph on the *St. Lawrence* was but a mockery, and his picture in the paper a foolish display.

But worst of all would be his beloved teacher's disappointment. He had never doubted that her confidence in his success was as great as his own, and he had even gone so far as to pick out the piece which he wanted her to play for him first on her new piano. It was called "Only Three Grains of Corn, Mother," and it was about the only piece he knew by name. He had often heard Red Maginnis's mother sing it, accompanied by her wheezy cabinet organ, and he had come to regard the doleful strains as surpassingly beautiful. Light, rollicking music had never appealed to his serious nature. He was glad now, though, that he had never spoken to Miss Harrow about this piece. It would have made her disappointment only the sharper, he reflected, amid his tears.

Suddenly he thought of his money in the bank. Would it not yet be possible to save the piano with that? That Mr. Hunter would be

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willing to spend a hundred dollars more seemed incredible to the boy.

But amid the bright visions of success which now danced before his eyes, one dark thought obtruded itself and made him cold about the heart. If he spent all his money for a piano, there would be no getting straightened by a doctor for him; and if he were not straightened Miss Harrow would never marry him. She might be willing to do so, as Mr. Fletcher had maintained, but he would be too proud ever to ask it. To tie such a fine, straight woman as she to a cripple for life was a thought that was repellant to him, even though he himself were the cripple.

Which, therefore, would she prefer—him, after being straightened, or the piano? The answer was a long time in coming. It was born in travail of the soul. It unfolded itself while beads of sweat exuded from his pain-contracted, brown brow. This woman—any woman—would prefer the piano, because there were so many men in the world already grown up and already straight whom she could get for a husband.

He stole back through the crowd as a

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wounded hare limps through the grass. Yet the glory of his contemplated sacrifice was already shining from his face, and his eyes were as lustrous as stars.

Fletcher turned, on feeling a tug at his coat-tail.

"Mr. Fletcher, I want to write some checks. I want to write ten, for ten dollars each."

"You must not, Abe," said Fletcher, with authority. "You will only be throwing your money away. That man over there has a thousand dollars for every one of yours, and he'll surely outbid you."

"Mebbe he won't, Mr. Fletcher, mebbe he won't," pleaded the boy. "And I—I can't go home without tryin' to git that piano for my teacher."

"You have tried. We have all tried."

"I—I ain't tried my hardest yet, Mr. Fletcher. And Mr. Barnes says it don't count till you *do* try your hardest."

"But I tell you it will do no good," argued the editor. "Besides, you need that money. You are going to get straightened with it some day, you said, and I can't let you throw it away."

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"Don't call it throwin' it away when it's for *her*," beseeched the boy, with trembling lips. "And, Mr. Fletcher—bend down so I kin whisper it—I wouldn't take no pleasure in bein' straightened if I thought I could have got this piano for her instead."

Fletcher paused in perplexity. He knew that Aaron Hathaway and Miss Harrow, as well as the public, would censure him if he yielded to the child's entreaties. Yet he was something of a Quixote himself, and in his heart he believed that the boy would be happier if he made the sacrifice, even though it proved in vain. Moreover, there was a possibility that it would not be in vain. There was a possibility that the spectacle of this lame child bidding his little savings away would shame Hunter from the contest. So Fletcher, though still in sore doubt, granted his permission. Blank checks were secured and carried to a side room, where Abe laboriously signed his name to ten of them.

"Now up on this rail!" exclaimed Fletcher, remembering the expedient of the captain of the *St. Lawrence*; and he lifted the boy, crutches and all, into plain sight.

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"One thousand dollars—I—I mean one thousand votes for Miss Harrow!" called Abe, in his shrill, boyish tenor, his voice shaking a little from fright.

A roar of applause followed. Yet as the child, leaning slightly forward on Fletcher's arms, fixed his feverishly bright eyes on the blackboard, to watch the changing of the figures, the boisterousness of the crowd gave way to a profounder feeling, and silence fell. In the midst of this silence came from the other side of the room the oft-repeated words of Jason Hunter: "One thousand for my daughter!"

"One thousand more for my teacher!" continued Abe, in a firmer voice.

"One thousand more for my daughter!" returned Hunter.

Thus they parried each other's blows for five times. Then Hunter's complacency failed him. Doubtless he regarded the boy merely as a stool-pigeon for some one else; and wishing to unmask him, he asked sharply:

"Mr. Christian, have you any means of knowing that that boy's checks are worth the paper they are written on?"

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Old man Christian—red-faced, herculean, and emotionless—brushed some tobacco ashes from the vast expanse of his greasy waistcoat before answering.

"If they ain't, the loss will be mine, not yours," he answered bluntly.

A ripple of laughter ran round the room at Hunter's expense; and the dapper little merchant, goaded into a fit of ill temper, venomously bid another thousand.

"The Lord has delivered our enemy into our hands!" exclaimed Fletcher exultantly to John Maxwell, cashier of the Angel's Landing bank. "Get up and tell them all about that money." And Maxwell, after a little further whispering, squared his broad shoulders and stepped forward.

"To set any doubts at rest, Mr. Christian," he began, in the loud voice which time and again had proved of golden value to him in county conventions, "I will certify this little boy's checks, if necessary. He has a deposit in our bank which will satisfy all the checks he has given or will give, every cent of which he earned himself, honestly, without detriment to any other man's rights, and which he has been

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saving in order to attempt a cure of his infirmities. He sees fit, however, out of loyalty to his teacher, to spend the money in this manner, in spite of all our endeavors to dissuade him."

Hunter smiled sneeringly at what he doubtless regarded as a mere piece of strategy; but the crowd, with truer instincts, again burst into a roar of applause. Honoria Hunter leaned forward and whispered something in her father's ear. He glanced at his wife and asked her a question in an undertone; then, when she promptly and vigorously shook her head, he faced the blackboard again.

Abe, who had been restrained by Fletcher until this by-play was over, now cast another vote. Hunter followed suit, but his words were instantly followed by hisses from all quarters of the room. Again Abe bid, with a pale face; and again Hunter, with his own face pale—for he had no physical courage—followed suit. Once more the hiss arose, louder and more prolonged than before. The cold-blooded man of business was reaping a few of the seeds he had sown in the past quarter of a century in Brazil.



“‘I—I bid one thousand votes fer my teacher.’”



THE  
FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION  
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For what seemed a long time Abe stood motionless, with his last check in his trembling fingers, and looked about with bewildered eyes. The crowd was as still as a body of worshipers. Old man Christian phlegmatically turned his little gray eyes from one contestant to the other in a noncommittal manner. Fletcher, fearing a collapse, slipped his arm further around the child's waist.

"I—I bid one thousand votes fer my teacher," said Abe, slowly and tremulously.

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### XI

It was his last stroke. For a moment there was silence. Honoria Hunter, with flaming cheeks, dropped her eyes. Even her father seemed undecided. Then once more he remorselessly bid a thousand votes for his daughter.

Instantly, taunts and cat-calls burst forth from the crowd; some one in the rear ripped out an oath, in spite of the ladies present; considerable pushing and jostling took place, and for a little while a small riot threatened.

"Order!" thundered old Christian. "We all have our sympathies in this fight, I hope, but it is votes, not oaths, that count."

At this moment a dark-haired, trim-looking man who had been quietly watching the contest from the rear, pushed briskly forward through the throng, opened the gate in the railing, and stepping inside murmured some-

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thing in the editor's ear. Hunter watched the newcomer foxily and somewhat uneasily.

"That man is the father of Gertrude Hamilton, one of the girls who withdrew," whispered Fletcher hopefully to Maxwell. "He hates Hunter worse than you hate a rattlesnake, and if there isn't something doing here in a minute I miss my guess. Brace up, Abie!" he added cheerily. And Abe, squeezing Fletcher's hand tightly, looked down from his high perch with a wan smile, and stopped his convulsive swallowing.

Christian nodded his great, grizzled head several times as Mr. Hamilton talked. Then the latter stepped outside the railing again, but retired no farther.

"Mr. Christian," said he quietly, "my daughter Gertrude wishes to transfer her 11,500 votes to Miss Harrow."

For an instant the startled hearers did not realize the import of his words; but when they did a pandemonium of commendatory cries leaped from three hundred throats.

"I object!" shouted Hunter, with a livid face, leaping to a chair. "This is a plot. She has no right to transfer her votes."

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"Credit Miss Harrow with 11,500 votes and wipe Miss Hamilton's name from the board," said the editor to the clerk. "Mr. Hunter, I'll decide what any contestant has the right to do or not to do."

"But Miss Hamilton doesn't control those votes. They were given to her personally, before any such contingency as the present one was dreamed of," insisted Hunter, more temperately.

"How do you know she doesn't control them? However, if she doesn't, and any of her supporters object to this disposition of their votes, I'll place them wherever designated—to your daughter's credit just as willingly as to anybody else's."

Not a vote was changed.

"I still protest against the principle," muttered Hunter.

"That there may be no misunderstanding as to the justice of this procedure," answered Christian, "I'll ask you to read the printed conditions on the back of any ballot. If you find anything there upholding your contention, read it out loud to the crowd. As a matter of fact, votes have been transferred in this

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manner from the beginning of the contest, and if I am not mistaken your daughter owes some of her present strength to this practice."

"She does," corroborated the clerk at the blackboard with a grin, and the question was settled.

"Then I bid 11,500 votes for my daughter!" cried Hunter, with Napoleonic grandiosity; and as his roll of bills was now exhausted, he wrote a check for the one hundred and fifteen dollars.

The tension was now so great that not even a hiss was heard this time. The contending forces were, in fact, more equal; and there was something admirable to many, no doubt, in the little man's bulldog pertinacity.

Mr. Hamilton smiled—a grim, half malicious smile.

"Miss Whitson also requests me to change her 11,200 votes to Miss Harrow," said he.

Hunter winced, and shot his neighbor a vicious glance. His wife said something to him, but he instantly shook his head. He was, in fact, too deeply involved now to withdraw without loss of prestige; and though the amount of money he was spending had plainly

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shaken Mrs. Hunter's resolution, he met this last sally of his enemy with a check for one hundred and twelve dollars.

"Miss Morrison will do the same with her 10,800 votes," continued Mr. Hamilton, smilingly.

Hunter hesitated. The crowd was but too evidently against him; in fact, they had unconsciously withdrawn from his neighborhood, leaving him and his family and a few faithful adherents somewhat by themselves. The thought may have occurred that he was purchasing victory at too high a price—not in mere dollars, but in the violence he was doing the feelings of his fellow-townsmen. He glanced thoughtfully across at the deformed lad on the railing. Abe's eyes were fixed unwaveringly upon him—not in appeal, as they had been before, but with the hostility of an Indian.

"You're fightin' your own size now, Mr. Hunter!" he suddenly called out shrilly, and the crowd yelped with delight.

"One hundred and eight dollars' worth of votes for my daughter!" was the badgered man's fierce response to this taunt.

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The game of transferring votes was now at an end, for those who followed Miss Morrison on the list had only small scores to their credit, such as Hunter, after his past prodigious efforts, would doubtless offset without a second thought. Nevertheless, more than a dozen of these candidates—one of them a five-year-old girl, with only five votes—courageously transferred their strength, one after the other. If Hunter was to have the piano, there was evidently a unanimous determination to make him pay as much for it as possible.

Mr. Hamilton, however, was not yet done; and after his opponent had met the scattering transfers, at a total cost of about seventy-five dollars, he again spoke. This time his smile was gone.

"Mr. Hunter, Miss Harrow now has 68,380 votes; your daughter, 68,500—a plurality of 120. I am going to give Miss Harrow just 121 votes out of my own pocket, which will leave her with a plurality of one vote. Now this contest is not for a piano, if you will remember. It is to determine the most popular young woman in the county. Miss Harrow may not be that young woman; but certainly,



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after what has taken place to-night, you cannot doubt that she is more popular than your daughter—for whom, however, I have the greatest respect, especially since learning that it was her desire to withdraw from this contest as soon as it was known that the little boy here was supporting Miss Harrow. In other words, it would be unfair, considering the conditions of this contest, for your daughter to have this piano. Still, if you have the money, I suppose you can buy it.”

“I have the money,” retorted Hunter.

“Very well, then. I merely want to tell you that if you do buy it, it will cost you ten thousand dollars in addition to what you have already spent. I am not so rich a man as you are—you proved that once in a contest with me that was not as innocent as this one. But I pledge my word to these gathered citizens of our town that rather than see injustice done, I will stand here and bid against you, if necessary, to the extent of a million votes, at one cent apiece, or ten thousand dollars in cash. It’s your move.”

For a moment the two lifelong rivals steadily, hostilely eyed each other. Then Mrs.

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Hunter, with an expression very different from that which she had worn earlier in the evening, plucked her husband's sleeve and whispered briefly in his ear. Hunter closed his check-book with an acid smile.

"I guess you want that piano worse than I do, Hamilton," he observed sardonically. "Your ideas of fair play, however, are not mine. I have been bidding against the whole town."

"Not until after you had bidden that little lame chap down and out," answered Hamilton.

The spectators let out their pent-up enthusiasm in a series of ringing whoops and yells. Old Christian, stolid, immovable old Christian, actually smiled; and struggling ponderously to his feet said to Abe, in his growling, leonine basso profundo: "Little fellow, give me your hand!"

Several scores of others demanded the same privilege; and for the next ten minutes Abe, after pulling his cap from his tousled head at Fletcher's whispered suggestion, held a regular levee, just like a little prince in a fairy tale. But the hand that gladdened him most, per-

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haps, was Honoria Hunter's, given to him with misty eyes, after her father and mother had gone home.

The delegation from Angel's Landing decided to spend the night in Brazil, and take their prize home with them in the morning, especially as the next day was Saturday and Abe would not have to go to school.

The lad slept none after the first peep of day, and was up an hour before any of the others. He watched the packing of the beautiful piano—*his* piano—with the profoundest solicitude; and it was not until the box was nailed up and securely roped on a dray that he drew a full breath.

When Angel's Landing hove in view Abe, in spite of his protests against "showing off," was hoisted to the top of the piano box; and in this fashion, with furiously thumping heart, he rode up to Miss Harrow's home. He little imagined how great was the surprise he had in store for her, for he took it for granted that she, like himself, had fully expected him to return with the piano. Therefore, when she appeared at the door, dressed in one of her

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simple summer gowns, and saw the dray, and the tall box thereon, and the little boy on top of that still, she started visibly.

"Not the piano!—for me!" she exclaimed, incredulously, glancing from one face to the other.

"Ask Abe," said Fletcher, with a smile. "He's the captain of this crew."

Her lips suddenly quivered—lips that one of the spectators besides Abe thought the sweetest in the world. Then she strode swiftly down the walk, in the same manner, it occurred to Abe, that she had crossed the playground the day he had knocked Tom Barnum senseless.

"Abe, is it for me?" she asked in a low, throaty voice, while her lashes rapidly blinked.

His homely little face lit up with a seraphic smile.

"Why, yessum, Miss Harrow! Didn't you know I went last night to git it for you?"

She made no answer; but using hub and tire of the low front wheel of the dray for steps, she mounted the platform, lifted Abe from his high perch, and kissed him repeatedly. He

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turned scarlet, and glanced shyly about to see if anyone were laughing. But no one was laughing, only smiling — enviously perhaps.

After the piano had been unboxed and set up in Isabel's room and admired by all, Abe was left upstairs alone. He was tarrying, as Fletcher well knew, to ask for the song he loved so well. But Fletcher himself had done a little tarrying downstairs, detaining Isabel until the others had gone.

"Sweetheart," said he, "you must know it sooner or later, so I'll tell you now. To win this piano last night, Abe spent the money he has been saving to get himself straightened with."

Isabel emitted a low cry of consternation.

"O Dick! *why* did you let him do it? It was like spending his heart's blood."

"I know it. But I couldn't stop him. And if I had stopped him, he would have been the unhappiest boy in this county to-day, instead of the happiest. I'll tell you all about it to-night. Don't cry—he might not understand. I love you, Isabel; but when I compare my love with that little lad's, I feel belittled, out-

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done, thrown in the shade. For, in spite of his talk about marrying you, his love is as unselfish as a mother's for her child."

He gazed tenderly for a moment at her downcast, wet eyes. Then he drew from his pocket a well-thumbed, thin volume in board covers.

"Here is a book of songs that I have just run down and borrowed from Mrs. Maginnis. It contains a song called 'Only Three Grains of Corn, Mother.' It's about a starving little girl. You won't think much of it, dear, but I happen to know that in Abe's opinion that is the sublimest piece of music ever written. He is waiting upstairs now, I suspect, to ask you to sing and play it for him. I didn't want him to be disappointed, so I got the book for you. The piece is as simple as A B C, and you can do it at sight. Good-by."

Abe asked for his favorite sure enough, and as Isabel sang the pathetic little melody—just as pathetic to her as to him, though for a different reason—her voice vibrated with emotion and the tears ran slowly down her cheeks. When she turned about, at the end, Abe's cheeks were wet, too.

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"Do you always cry when you hear that song, Abe?" she asked quietly.

"I never cried before, because I didn't want Mrs. Maginnis to see me."

"And you didn't care if I saw you?"

"No'm."

"Well, we're a couple of cry-babies, dear," said she. "But we want to be, don't we?"

She led him to a sofa, and drawing his head tightly against her breast—a maiden breast but aching with the mother-pain—she stroked his hair. Once he would have resisted such petting, thinking it unmanly to submit; but he had no such thought now.

"My dear little boy," she began uncertainly, "how can I thank you for what you have done? Mr. Fletcher told me all about what happened last night. I know what you were saving that money for, and I——" She could get no further.

"You mustn't think, Miss Harrow," he answered earnestly, "that I spent that money like as if it had been for something else. I spent it because I *wanted* to. So you see it was easier to spend it than not to."

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"Because you loved me?" she asked, in a voice so soft and low.

His sensitive soul recoiled from the confession. Truly his was not love, but worship; and he faltered in her presence as in an angel's.

"Do you not?" she repeated, still soft and low.

For answer he suddenly flung his arms about her neck, and with a sob drew his puny little body close to hers. In that inspired moment she would have gladly, humbly, drained her own robust body of its vital fluid if thereby she could have repaired his, as he had dreamed of doing with his savings.



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### XII

To Abe's grief, he was prevented by one of his periodical sick spells from attending the last week of school and delivering a declamation on which he had labored for weeks. To compensate him for this disappointment, as well as to soften her departure for the summer vacation, Isabel presented him with a little wagon—a bright-red beauty, with steel spokes and rubber tires, and real shafts which would fit a dog or goat.

It was a gift to gladden any boy's heart, aside from what it implied; and for two or three days, while still too weak to play, Abe would sit and look at it by the hour, now and then caressing the smooth, varnished paint, or running his fingers along the glistening spokes. Each night it had to be carried upstairs at bedtime, and each morning it came down to breakfast when he came, with the as-

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sistance of either Mrs. Derriicks or his grandfather.

Later, when Abe was stronger, one of the boys would get between the shafts, with strings tied to his arms for reins, and play horse, and give the little convalescent a ride. But Abe craved a four-footed steed—one more like a real horse than a boy was—and the lot naturally fell on Watch. Now Watch was not an amiable animal. He kept the cats of the neighborhood in a state of terror; he ran out and barked at every farmer's wagon which rumbled by; and in the village he had been accused of killing chickens. But he undoubtedly loved Abe with all his canine soul. At Abe he had never even growled from puppyhood; and he now stood as docile as a lamb while the boy, with infinite pains, harnessed him with odds and ends of twine to the new wagon.

Nevertheless, Watch had no mind to learn new tricks of this character, even for his beloved master's sake; so, when he grew tired of the sport, he simply wriggled out of the flimsy harness. In doing so he quite unintentionally overturned the wagon, and brought

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his driver into stunning contact with the ground. Abe, still weak and irritable, lost his temper; and then it was that, for the first time in his little life, he raised his crutch and struck his darling dog.

Watch, yelping more from astonishment than pain, dashed out of the gate and down the path to the village. Abe, overwhelmed with the enormity of his act, stood rooted to the spot for a moment with bloodless cheeks. Then, with an inarticulate cry of remorse, he too hurried through the gate and down the steep path.

When he reached the bottom the dog was nowhere in sight. With crutches sharply thumping the board sidewalks, and his little twisted body projecting itself forward in long strides, with a vigor born of desperation, Abe hastened from one of the dog's favorite haunts to another—to the alley back of the post-office, where a cat might be started at almost any hour of the day; to the creamery, where tidbits in the shape of slops of milk could usually be lapped without objection from anyone; to the meat market, where there was always a bone for him.

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Meanwhile the boy's shrill, anxious "*Hyuh, Watch! Hyuh, Watch!*" was lifted at every corner. But no Watch, with wagging tail and glad eyes, came bounding toward him. For the twentieth time the boy's lips quivered, tears stood in his eyes, and his little breast ached with the pain which is as old as erring and repentant humanity itself.

Finally he found himself in the outskirts of the village. Some boys, among whom he recognized Red Maginnis, were playing ball in a field. Forgetful of his new crutches and of the path by which he might have reached the ball ground without difficulty, Abe plunged into the tall, dusty weeds and tough brambles, and fiercely fought his way through. When he at last emerged on the other side, he was panting, his hands and cheeks were bleeding from numerous scratches, and his eyes smarted from dog-fennel.

"Boys, Watch is lost!" he called huskily.  
"Will you help me find him?"

Abe's playmates were always ready to oblige him. Moreover, there survives in the heart of every true boy the primal instinct to hunt, no matter what the object. So after a

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hasty and noisy consultation, the erstwhile ball players were off with a shout. But, fast as they ran, the little cripple kept pace with them, although his heart pounded as if it would burst. Not even a barbed-wire fence, on which he tore his clothes and dug a deep gash in one of his crutches, threw him much behind the others.

Like a band of Indians, the boys coursed about the village, whooping, stoning cats incidentally, and loudly calling Watch's name. It was in vain, and at last they concluded to separate, take different routes, and meet at the post-office. Sick in body as well as soul, Abe now dropped out of the pursuit, and dragged himself toward the post-office to await results. His course took him past the Methodist parsonage, and on the impulse of the moment he entered and rang the bell.

"Mr. Barnes, Watch is lost!" began the child impetuously, when the young minister appeared at the door. "Do you think you could help me find him? I hate to ast you, but the boys and me can't find him, and I—I don't know what else to do."

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The dusty, drooping little figure hanging there between the crutches, with its flushed face, weary eyes, and tremulous, appealing voice, went straight to the man's heart.

"Certainly I'll help you, Abe. But you must come in and rest. You are all tired out. Don't worry any more. Even if we don't find Watch at once, I haven't a doubt that he will go back home all right. He loves you too well to stay away long."

"Mr. Barnes, he'll never come back!" burst out the child tragically. "I struck him! And he loved me the best of anybody on earth. Oh, I wisht I was dead!"

His heart poured out its long suppressed grief in pitiful, wrenching sobs. But they brought relief, after a little; and when Mrs. Barnes had washed the child's hot, tear-stained face with cool water, and induced him to lie down on a couch and rest, the minister hastened off on his search.

For an hour he conscientiously tramped about the village, keeping a sharp lookout for the dog's familiar figure, and making inquiries here and there. He met several of Abe's scouts, but they had nothing to report.

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Finally, however, on one of the outlying streets, he saw Red Maginnis come flying down the dusty road, with his tattered hat in his hand and his long, unkempt, red hair streaming out behind. The boy evidently had news of an important character, and the minister, for some reason, halted with a sense of uneasiness.

"Mr. Barnes," shouted the lad as loudly as his breathless condition would permit, "Watch—Watch is dead! That man that just moved into Hitchcock's house—that man from the country—caught him suckin' eggs, he says, and—and shot him!"

"Dead!" repeated Mr. Barnes, with a sickness creeping over him. "Are you sure, Reddy?"

"Yes, sir. I seen him. He's layin' right in the road, with his tongue out, and his head full of buck-shot."

It was too true. When Mr. Barnes reached the scene, a group of eager little boys had already gathered about the remains of the poor animal; and were looking, half in fear, half in fascination, at the eyes glazed in death.

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"Boys," began the minister gravely, "this will be a sad, sad day for Abe. If any of you happen to see him before I do, I don't want you to tell him of this. Send him to me, and let me do it."

"Oh, say, Mr. Barnes, he's comin' now!" excitedly cried one of the boys.

The man turned with the others. Minister of the Gospel though he was, and familiar with grief and death, he felt for the moment like shirking his duty and fleeing from the scene to come. For, far down the street, a grotesque little figure between crutches was coming rapidly toward them.

Barnes did not attempt to stop and prepare Abe, for it was plain from his speed that he either already knew or suspected the truth. As he came up, gasping for breath and reeling from fatigue, the circle of boys sympathetically opened to admit him, and the next moment he stood in the presence of his beloved dead.

He did not speak. His eyes simply glazed in inexpressible horror. A deadly pallor overspread his face. His scrawny little throat worked spasmodically until the minister could



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no longer look. The fingers on the cross-pieces of his crutches twitched and gradually relaxed their hold. Then he fell, senseless, across Watch's body.

Sorrowfully, after restoring the child to something like consciousness, Mr. Barnes hailed a passing buggy, and was driven, with the little sufferer in his arms, to the house on the hill. There, following the sobbing Mrs. Derrieks, he carried Abe upstairs to bed.

The boy did not rally as a robust child would have done. For several days he lay in a kind of stupor—a merciful stupor, in which he probably suffered no pain. Some spring within seemed to have snapped; the incentive to live was gone.

Abe's friends, big and little, faithfully climbed the hill to see him. But it was Mr. Barnes, even before Fletcher, that the child seemed to turn to in this crisis; and the minister spent a portion of each day in the little upstairs room.

One afternoon, when he was brighter than usual, Abe asked quietly:

“Do you remember what you said once, Mr. Barnes, about dogs goin' to heaven?”

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"Yes."

"Do you still think they go?"

"Yes."

Abe gazed at the ceiling with an illuminated face, as if he were even then being vouchsafed a peep into heaven and beheld his dear dog.

"Do you think Watch knows now, sir, how sorry I am that I struck him?"

"I haven't a doubt of it, my boy."

"And do you think he's forgive me?"

"Just as you would have forgiven him."

"Oh, I'm so glad, so glad!" he cried, in a voice which weakness had rendered thinner and shriller than ever. His face wore a seraphic smile, and tears of joy welled up in his eyes. He lay still for several minutes, in a kind of trance.

"Will it be long, do you think, before I go?" he then asked.

"Go where?" asked the minister, with an involuntary start.

"To heaven."

"I hope it may be very long. You are too young to die yet. You don't want to go now, do you?"

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"Yes. I want to see Watch and tell him how sorry I am. Then I'll be sure he knows."

"But do you want to leave the rest of us behind—your playmates, and your grandfather, and Mr. Fletcher, and Miss Harrow, and me?"

"No. I wisht you could all go along. Me and Watch would like it better with you all there. But you kin all come later. We'll be there to meet you. And I'd want to stay here longer now," he added apologetically, "but Watch might git tired of waitin' for me, and think I wasn't sorry, after all, that I hit him." He closed his eyes for a moment, as if the talking had wearied him. Then he went on: "If a boy had told some lies before he died, do you think the angels would keep him out of heaven for that?"

"Have you told any?"

"Yes. I told the boys once I could git my legs fixed for five dollars, and that I'd sooner be lame than have good legs. And I told 'em I knew a general that was lame, and had a million soldiers, and none as good as him. But I don't."

"I don't think that would keep you out of

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heaven, especially if you are sorry," answered Mr. Barnes, with misty eyes.

"I am sorry," murmured Abe dreamily.

He fell into a gentle slumber, soothed by the monotonous, midsummer chorus of insects outside, and the minister stole away.

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### XIII

A MILE and a half north of Angel's Landing, the bluff was crowned by a great house whose long, slender form, upper and lower veranda, fretwork and railings, square cupola, and tall twin chimneys at once suggested a steamboat. Its builder, an old riverman who had worked up from cabin boy to captain, now slept in the little family graveyard near by, inclosed by an iron fence and shaded by pyramidal spruces. The shaft of red Scotch granite overlooked the beautiful stream below; and if the spirit of the veteran steamboatman still revisited the spot, it must have been soothed by the sweet, solemn sound of the tolling bell which still ascended from many boats as they passed the place.

The property, however, had been bought by a young physician from the East. Though it was understood that he was rich, and had

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abandoned his profession in order to devote himself to the care of his invalid wife, he had never been known to refuse a call to alleviate suffering. He had, therefore, in less than a year, acquired considerable reputation in the neighborhood for benevolence and skill. Consequently, when Abe grew weaker from day to day, in spite of the local physician's efforts, it was to this philanthropic stranger that Aaron Hathaway desperately appealed for aid.

When the farmer drove into the barnyard, on his return, Mrs. Derricks wiped her eyes and breathed a fervent prayer of gratitude at sight of a fine-looking, grave young man in the buggy, with a medicine case across his knees. His very looks were reassuring; and after he had spent an hour and a half in the sick room, and asked what Mrs. Derricks declared to be a thousand questions, even the conservative Aaron Hathaway felt that he had found the right man.

His first act, though, was a radical one. He swept all the bottles and powders and pills off the shelf in Abe's room, and said decisively: "No more medicine!" The pronouncement staggered both Hathaway and Mrs.

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Derricks for a moment. Nevertheless, Abe began to improve, in some magic way, from that hour. The doctor called every morning, without being asked, and it was not long before he occupied a place in Abe's affections alongside Mr. Barnes and Mr. Fletcher.

The physician, on his part, was impressed first by the little sufferer's patience and fearlessness of death, and then by his almost uncanny wisdom and vivid imagination. He would have liked it better, though, professionally, if Abe had not been quite so ready to cross the Great River; and his first business was to give the boy an incentive to live. It was a difficult task; but little by little, as the boy's strength was skilfully augmented by fresh air and nourishing food, his mind was won from heavenly to terrestrial things.

The doctor proved a capital story-teller; and, best of all, his stories were true, like Swan Swanson's. They were about things he himself had seen and done in Europe, Asia, and Africa, and the distant islands of the sea. He had seen kings and crocodiles, and had picked cocoanuts off the trees on which they grew. He had been in countries where the

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little boys were black or brown, went naked all the time, and could swim like otters. He had seen men who wore rings in their noses, like a hog; and women who blacked their teeth instead of their shoes.

But Abe was a better listener than talker in the presence of his elders; and when his new friend tried to draw him out about himself, he manifested an unexpected shyness. It was only by degrees that Dr. Train gathered the events which in the child's simple history loomed so large—his exploits with Watch, his copying for Mr. Fletcher, the winning of the piano, going to school, and other things.

In time, however, Abe conquered his taciturnity, and began, with little or no coaching, to air his peculiar views on men and women and life in general. Then it was that the child became a study of unfailing interest to the reflective physician; his visits, first a charity, became a pleasure; and it was not long before he was carrying home tales of the boy to his wife and repeating his quaint sayings.

One day, when Abe was unusually cheerful, he asked his grandfather to tell Dr. Train how



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he had been blown up on a steamboat. Aaron Hathaway would fain have reduced the usual dramatic recital to a tame and colorless relation of facts, as more becoming the ears of a cosmopolite like the doctor. But Abe checked him at the first words and insisted that he tell the story in the old way. So Hathaway began with his customary, "One night, about nine years ago," etc.

The story had an unexpected and, to Abe, somewhat puzzling effect upon the young physician, in spite of his familiarity with death in its manifold forms. His eyes filled with tears, and when he spoke his voice was very tender.

"What was you cryin' about a while ago, Dr. Train?" Abe asked, after his grandfather had gone downstairs.

"Don't you think that story would be likely to make anyone cry?" asked Train, with his kind, grave smile.

"Was you thinkin' about my father and mother that died, or about me?"

"I was thinking of all of you."

The child was silent for a moment.

"I wouldn't want you to feel sorry for me because I'm crippled. I wouldn't git mad at

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you for doin' it, you know, because I like you. But I don't mind bein' crippled—very much. When you git used to bein' crippled, it's nothing. You forgit all about it. Besides, I had a chance once to git straightened, but I spent the money for somethin' else."

He paused. This certainly sounded a good deal like that boast to the boys which he had confessed to Mr. Barnes. Alexander Train, however, saw nothing boastful in the speech—only bravery, and a desire to cause his friends no unnecessary pain.

"And did you never regret spending the money?" he asked curiously. He knew what the money had gone for.

"No, sir. Because what I spent it for done me more good than bein' straightened would. Dr. Train, do you think a woman would sooner marry a straight man than a crooked one?"

"That's a rather difficult question to answer. Naturally, most women expect to marry straight men, for the simple reason that there are so many more straight ones than crooked ones. If two men—one straight, the other crooked—were exactly equal otherwise, and a

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woman were asked to choose between them, I presume she would choose the straight one. But in real life, things don't happen that way. We learn to love people without much regard to their physical appearance. Now, if a man were good and honest and loyal, and a woman loved him, she wouldn't trade him, though he were as crooked as a ram's horn, for the straightest man that ever walked the face of the earth."

Abe's face glowed. "That's just what Mr. Fletcher said!" he exclaimed exultantly. "But do you think a man would want to marry a *woman* that had to go on crutches and had crooked legs?"

"They have done it—more than once. Love is a strange thing, Abe—a kind of a magician. My wife doesn't have to go on crutches, and her legs are not crooked. On the contrary, she is still very beautiful. At least, I think so. But she's sick a great deal of the time. She can't walk two blocks without being tired, and we can't go camping and fishing and traveling together as we used to. Yet I am sure that I love her more than I did when she was strong and well. And should she get so that she

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would have to go on crutches—or, worse yet, not go at all—I am sure that I should love her still more.”

Abe thought a moment.

“Would most men do that?”

“I think so.”

“I thought that women were mostly gooder than men.”

“They are.”

“Is it because your wife is sick that she ain't been over to see me?”

“It's a rather long trip for her. Maybe she can come over, though, some day when she is feeling real well. She wants to. We often talk about you, and she has become very much interested in you. She was so sorry to hear of your trouble about Watch, for she is very tender-hearted, and loves dogs herself.”

“Did you—did you tell her about Watch?” asked the boy with a sudden huskiness.

“Yes, I told her all about the poor fellow.”

“Do you think that dogs go to heaven?”

“Oh, yes.”

“And cats, too?”

“Yes,” answered Train, willing to admit the whole animal kingdom to please the lad.

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“ ‘Cause if they ain't any cats there for Watch to chase, he won't be happy.”

Train smiled. He had not foreseen this use of a cat's immortality.

“ That kind of sport is all right for the dog, Abe, but it's pretty tough on the cat. In heaven I fancy it will be so arranged that dogs can be happy without chasing cats, just as it will be so arranged that men can be happy without chasing dollars.”

“ That would be better,” admitted Abe, “ ‘cause sometimes I used to feel sorry for the cats myself, especially if they was little. But Watch never hurt 'em much. And if they stopped and put up their backs at him, he'd stop, too.”

The doctor rode home between the dusty, fence-row shrubbery in a thoughtful mood. The study of inheritance, so closely allied to his profession, had always been an absorbing one for him; and in the past weeks he had more than once wondered by what unknown law a man like Aaron Hathaway could, in the second generation, beget a child like Abe. He had explained it by the intervention of the mother's, and perhaps the grandmother's,

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blood. Since hearing the steamboat story, of course, and learning that the child was an adopted one, this problem was solved. But there was still much left in Abe's case to give food for thought.

When he got home he found his wife resting on a couch on the front veranda, where she could look across the valley to the blue Kentucky hills—the same hills that Abe loved so well. She was still beautiful, as her husband had said. She was not even emaciated, though slender as a willow. Yet there was an ethereal air about her which plainly told that her vital forces were at ebb tide; and when she raised herself to a sitting posture to greet her husband, his experienced eye informed him that she was suffering from one of her cruel periodical headaches. But they had long since agreed not to discuss these headaches or any other of her ailments; so he only kissed her, and held her in his arms a moment, after which he rang for a pitcher of lemonade and claret, and then sat down and told her the story of his little patient's strange coming to Angel's Landing.

“That little boy's patience and courage

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have been an inspiration to me," she observed, when he had finished. "They will be more so than ever now. Do you remember that I didn't want you to go, the day the old man came for you? I had begun to fear that if you continued to answer every call from the people here, I should soon see no more of you than I used to, when you were practicing regularly. But my selfishness has been rebuked. That little boy has given to instead of taken away from me. I have learned a lesson."

"It never took you long to learn a lesson, Marjorie—of that kind," said he, with a smile. "Sometimes I wish you were not quite so apt a pupil. If you had been a little more selfish, perhaps I should have been a little more unselfish."

"Oh!" she exclaimed playfully. "So you wanted to climb to virtue over my prostrate soul. I am afraid your footing would have been very insecure."

He smiled again and stroked her hair, and laid his lips to her temple.

"The first day that you are feeling strong enough, I want you to ride over to Angel's Landing with me. A sight of the child would

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do you more good than all you have heard of him, for he is a miracle; and I am sure that a sight of you would do him good. He asked me to-day if it was because of your sickness that you had never been to see him. There was something affecting to me in his artless assumption that you would want to visit a sick person if you could."

"Bless him!" she murmured, with misty eyes. "I shall go."

A few days later Abe wanted the doctor to see his "examination card"—Miss Harrow's official report showing the boy's standing in his various studies for the year.

"Mrs. Dericks has gone down town to get some meat for dinner," explained Abe. "But you ask grandpa for it; and if he ain't there, you look in the bottom of the clock. I keep it there so if burglars should git in they wouldn't find it."

Train found no one downstairs; so, after a momentary hesitation as to the propriety of the act, he opened the tall, old-fashioned clock, and began to rummage through the miscellaneous collection inside—trinkets of jewelry,



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old letters, time-stained notes and receipts, and little yellow-backed notebooks containing Aaron Hathaway's succinct record of crops and weather for many years back.

The report card seemed to be missing; but not wishing to disappoint Abe, Train burrowed to the very bottom of the heap. Feeling something hard and round, like a locket, he yielded to his antiquarian propensities—though not without a prick of conscience—and drew the article forth.

It was a locket, as he had guessed—a baby's locket, strung on a bit of narrow, faded ribbon. But being evidently of recent make, it possessed no interest for him, and he was about to put it back when he chanced to discover, on the opposite side, the letter "A," in Old English script. He started, wrenched the keep-~~ake~~ open, and glanced at the picture inside. Then, with sudden pallor and shaking hands, he sank into a chair.

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### XIV

HE was still sitting in the chair, ten minutes later, when Aaron Hathaway entered at his deliberate pace.

"Where did you get this?" demanded Train.

The old man opened his eyes in mild surprise at the abrupt tone. But when he saw what the doctor held in his hand, and noted how that hand shook, he stared vacantly for a moment, without speaking, like a man accused of crime. He was not a quick thinker, but in that instant he realized that the little waif of the *Flora MacDonald* had come into its own.

"That was on Abie when we found him," he answered thickly.

"Then he is my child," said Train, with white lips. He held out the locket. "I can't do it—my hand is too unsteady—but you re-

## THE LITTLE KING

move the picture and see if you find the name of 'G. W. Coe & Co., Philadelphia,' behind it."

"That name is there," answered Hathaway, stolidly, almost coldly. "I looked it up when we was advertisin' him." Then his lips trembled and his eyes filled. "Your gain is my loss, Dr. Train," said he, extending his rough hand. "I oughtn't to put it that way. I ought to say that my loss is your gain. But I can't help it. You don't know how I love that little fellow. He's all I have to love."

"Yes, yes, I think I know!" exclaimed the younger man, rapidly crossing and recrossing the room with bowed head. "I think I know. You have been a true grandfather to him. You shall always be his grandfather. He has no other."

He continued his swift pacing to and fro for a moment, as if trying to keep up with his flying thoughts. Then he began again:

"I can't realize it all yet. My head whirls. It means so much—this resurrection from the dead—for though we still hoped that he lived, we had adjusted ourselves, unconsciously, to his being dead. I dread to break

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the news to his mother—joy may kill her. And we can't break it to him yet. It might kill him also. Poor little Abe! My son, my dear, little, long-lost son! We christened him Alexander, after myself; but we shall always call him Abe. That is his true name."

"I named him Abraham because I thought mebbe that 'A' stood for Abraham," interpolated Hathaway sadly.

"Yes," murmured Train, scarcely hearing. "He was stolen by a nurse—a woman whose fidelity I would almost have vouched for with my life. We would have so gladly paid the ransom she asked; but a sense of obligation to other parents and their children, a fear of encouraging the nefarious traffic, held our hands. We believed that we could get him back without paying the ransom, though by spending more. We did spend more. We spent, before we were through, fifty thousand dollars in the employment of detectives. They traced the woman to Pittsburg, and our hearts grew lighter. We believed we should soon hold the boy in our arms again. But at Pittsburg her trail vanished as completely as if she had been swallowed by the earth. And though

## THE LITTLE KING

we raised the reward, month after month, until it stood at one hundred thousand dollars—all that we had—nothing came of it.

“With the flight of years we began to look upon our little one as dead, perhaps the victim of neglect, perhaps of something worse. Ah, the horror of those dreams of mine of all the cruel, strange ways in which that she-devil might have put our babe to death! And if he wasn't dead, he was lost to us forever, growing up in ignorance of his name and parentage. But I cannot talk of it further now. I came down to find his report card, which he said was in the clock. I can't see him again just now. Tell him—tell him I was called home.”

But he did not go home. He did not even go to his buggy. Instead, he walked distractedly forward, in the direction the path led him, until he finally found himself on the bluff, by the side of the great rock on which Abe so often sat. Quite unconscious of his child's predilection for the spot, he climbed the rock and gazed across to the hills bordering the bottomlands on the other side of the river—the hazy, purple, mystery-enshrouded

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hills among which Abe had so often wandered in spirit, while far, far away, to north and south, the smoke from steamboats hung in detached clouds above the course of the hidden river.

The man's mind flew back over the years during which he had carried his wife from continent to continent in search of health, until his own dark hair, though still thick, had become streaked with gray. Medicine could not cure Marjorie, and the only hope lay in some magic climate or water. Yet even this hope was slender, for Train well knew that her sickness was of the soul, not the body. The dagger in her maternal breast was slowly poisoning all.

Now that cruel weapon was about to be withdrawn. Their child, by mere chance, after strange vicissitudes, had come back. But, alas, ignorant, uncouth, crippled for life! What would be the effect upon the sensitive mother? The pathos of it ground the father's heart, and burying his face in the hollow of his arm he wept like a child. Yet not bitterly or in despair. The child which had come back to them was theirs—Marjorie's and

## THE LITTLE KING

his; and the great fact of parenthood, rooted deep in the breast of man and animal alike from primeval dawn, submerged all lesser facts and made them of small account.

It chanced to be one of Mrs. Train's bad days, and when Train got home he found her lying in a cool, dark room, into which the breath of the blooming wild-cherry tree outside pulsed with each vagrant zephyr. It was not the hour he would have chosen for his revelation, but he felt as if he could not wait and that she would not have had him wait. The soul's demands came before those of the body. Events do not consult the choice of man, and the wind is not always tempered to the shorn lamb.

So, at least, Train felt as he entered the room, cautioned by his professional instincts to withhold the news for at least a little while, but impelled by his husband's and father's heart to shout it out from the threshold. He chose a middle course. For a long time he held Marjorie's hand—tightly in order to hide an uncontrollable tremor which had seized his own. Now and then he smoothed her brow, or touched her lips with his own.

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"Now you must go and get your supper," said she finally.

"Marjorie——" He stopped, half frightened at his own voice.

She opened her eyes inquiringly and glanced at his face. Then she suddenly rose to her elbow. The ear of plundered maternity had caught the note for which it had been hearkening for years, and her placid blue eyes lit with a fire which made them almost fierce.

"Aleck, have you heard anything?" she demanded, seizing his hands as if she feared he might run away. "Don't try to spare me, or in your kindness you will kill me. Quick! Is he alive or dead?"

"Alive!"

"Where?"

"In Angel's Landing. Marjorie, my beloved, be strong! He is my little patient—little Abe!"

There was no supper that night for either the master or mistress of Pilot House. It was not until the servant had made the third announcement at the door that either of them was conscious of it. The young mother, clasping her husband's head to her breast, lay



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## THE LITTLE KING

with a rapt face, looking not at the ceiling but through it, into the starry expanse beyond, and with the eyes of her mind, not those of the body. She had often lain thus and looked into the same mysterious, distant vault, when she had thought it probable that her babe's spirit was there, playing with the cherubim and seraphim.

At last she arose to a sitting posture on the edge of the bed, smoothed out her skirts, and fingered her tousled hair.

"Let's go outside, dear," said she quietly. "This room oppresses me. I feel as if I shall never be sick any more—as if darkened rooms and cautious footfalls and all the appurtenances of invalidism are never to be for me again. Oh, God has been so good! Yet—a cripple for life! Oh, my baby, my baby, they have hurt you so! Tell me, shall I be shocked to see him? Has he changed so much?"

"No, the shock is all over for you. You know the worst. His little body has been hopelessly wrecked. He will always use crutches. But what has been taken from his body seems to have been added to his mind. He is a child of whom we may well be proud.

## OF ANGEL'S LANDING

As I told you when I little dreamed he was of our own flesh and blood, he is a marvelous boy."

"Lover, I want our baby to-night!" said she suddenly, laying her hand appealingly upon his arm. "He has been gone so long, so long, and my breast aches with emptiness."

"Wait till morning, dear," he pleaded. "He would be asleep by the time we could get there. Let's go in the sunlight, in the dawn of a new day. He's only a mile or two away, and he's in the best of hands. Besides, we must not tell him the great news until he has become somewhat accustomed to you and is a little stronger."

Twilight was just falling. Seated on a rustic bench—she with her head upon her husband's shoulder and a pillow at her back—they watched the distant purple woodlands across the river deepen into blackness as the light slowly died away. They saw the pale stars hung out, one by one, like lanterns of heaven; while below, in farmhouse windows, the evening lamps multiplied until the valley was studded with yellow points of light. Each one marked a home—a gathering together, be-

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neath a loved roof, after the day's toil, of father, mother, and children.

"Home—home—the sweetest word in all the world!" murmured Marjorie.

They sat for hours until the stars burned brilliantly in their purple vault and the lights below were snuffed out one by one, and the valley slept.

"I, too, shall sleep this night," said she.

Her husband was skeptical, but she kept her word. It was he this time who lay through the night with eyes which seemed never to have learned the art of sleep.

He envied her simple faith, her simple acceptance of what Providence had to bestow, her simple yielding of what it withheld. He had chafed and fretted under their great misfortune; had alternately pleaded with God and hardened his heart against God. But through it all he had kept health and strength. She, on the other hand, after the first appalling burst of grief, had quietly accepted the decree of fate. But her tide of life had begun to ebb from that hour.

To-night, again, the difference between them—the fundamental difference perhaps

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between man and woman—was exemplified. When the Unseen Hand had all but replaced her child at her breast, she slept. *He* struggled with inward problems, interrogated Fate, and pondered the order of things. To all his questionings, though, he had to confess that his dear bedfellow's sweet, peaceful face upon the pillow, and the gentle rise and fall of her white bosom, were a better answer than any his brain could devise. Smiling at his erstwhile fears of the effect of his revelation upon her, he leaned on his elbow and softly brushed her temples with his lips. She did not waken; but her arm, bared to the elbow, unconsciously stole about his neck, and she smiled in her sleep, as does a babe to whom the angels talk.

## THE LITTLE KING

### XV

It was a perturbed household on the bluff above Angel's Landing which awaited the coming of Dr. and Mrs. Train the next morning. Mrs. Derricks, with red lids, moved about the kitchen in a dazed manner quite foreign to her energetic and practical nature. Occasionally she paused and wiped her eyes with her apron.

Aaron Hathaway was in even a worse state, though his stoical temperament gave fewer tokens. He wandered about the barn like one in a dream, fed the horses oats a second time—to their grateful surprise—and forgot to feed the hogs at all. With the purpose of showing a decent respect for his coming guests—the doctor could no longer be regarded in a professional light—he had put on his black suit. As he seldom wore it except at funerals, its presence alone was enough to in-

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duce an uneasy, mournful mood. But grasping his customary occupations as a drowning man grasps a straw, he backed his buggy out of the shed and started to grease it.

"Mr. Hathaway, air you goin' to grease that buggy in your good clothes?" called Mrs. Derricks, from the kitchen door. In spite of her distress, she was not quite lost to a sense of the fitness of things.

"I be," he answered grimly.

But everything went wrong. The wrench was not in its place; he soiled his fingers in spite of his care; every tire left a streak of dust on his clothes; and when finally the tedious task was over, and the last nut screwed on tight, he discovered that instead of axle grease he had used a preparation for cracked hoofs. Then he gave up, returned to the house, lit his pipe, and sat down on the side porch frankly miserable.

Abe had been brought downstairs for the first time that morning, and was bolstered up with pillows in a big rocking chair on the front porch. Around him was a curious collection of keepsakes and toys—a picture book from Mr. Barnes, his pass book at the bank,

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crutches, a copy of the *Enterprise* containing his picture, a cage of white mice—all his favorites, in fact, except his wagon, the sight of which, in spite of the beloved donor, he could no longer endure.

Over the brow of the bluff he could see the roofs of the hamlet below, the wharf, and the stretch of shining river. To the left of the porch, at the far side of the yard, where the grasshoppers fiddled by day and the crickets chirped by night, was a little mound, already greening with grass, and marked by a wooden headboard. It was Watch's grave.

Neglecting his playthings, the child divided his attention between this mound and the blue river below. In his mind there was a bond between them. He had loved them both; both had loved him. The dog had passed on to that place of celestial mystery called heaven. The river led the way to remote and equally mysterious haunts of men, where gorgeous birds flitted through the aisles of gloomy forests; where alligators splashed in inky streams, and lemons and oranges grew as plentifully as apples in his grandfather's orchard.

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They had told him that morning that Mrs. Train was coming to see him, and the thought of meeting his dear doctor's wife had given him a pleasurable thrill. But between Watch and the river, he had long since forgotten all about her, and had lost himself in reveries, now painfully sharp, now sweetly serene, alternately moving him to tears and smiles.

It was not a very strange coincidence that among the phantoms which thronged his brain this morning, he should see his parents, whom he sometimes pictured as sleeping in the bottom of the river, sometimes as living in the most beautiful of palaces, far, far away, in a grove ever swept with cooling breezes, soothed by the plash of crystal fountains, serenaded by birds, and perfumed by flowers.

How many, many times had his little heart ached to fly away to that enchanted land! Sometimes, in the intensity of his longings, he would lift his arms as a wounded bird lifts its useless wings. Then, mercifully, his mood would change; and as the caged eagle turns from its dream of freedom in the sunlit, azure depths above to the meat in its keeper's hands, so Abe would turn from his fairy world to



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his real world—to his meals, the splitting of kindling, going to school, gathering old iron, playing pirate in the barn on rainy Saturdays.

Mrs. Derricks was not an imaginative woman by any means, but between sunrise and half-past nine she had conjured up at least a dozen different images of the woman who was to take their little Abe away. But whether light or dark, tall or short, handsome or plain, this imaginary creature was always an invalid, and always dissolved in tears—the latter due in part to her invalidism, in part to the joy of finding her child, and in part to sorrow over his crippled condition. In her goodness of heart, Mrs. Derricks had even rehearsed some consolatory remarks fit to be addressed to a perfect lady, and which she intended to deliver when Mr. Hathaway, who was not fond of lachrymose oratory, was not listening.

Imagine the good housekeeper's surprise, therefore, when a tall, straight, light-haired woman of remarkable beauty rode into the barnyard, stepped down from the buggy with scarcely more than Dr. Train's forefinger to assist her, and then with outstretched hands smilingly approached Aaron Hathaway, who

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had gone out to meet his guests and tie their horse.

"Mr. Hathaway," Mrs. Derricks heard the lady say, "no mere words can ever express our gratitude to you. We—Dr. Train and I—must *live* that. So, with your permission, I shan't try to speak it—at least now."

"I'd rather you would never try it, madam," answered Hathaway, with a simple dignity which won the other instantly. "Besides, the debt ain't all on your side."

As the trio approached the side door—in spite of the housekeeper's repeated admonition to Hathaway to be sure and take the guests in by the front door—the smile which had so surprised Mrs. Derricks faded from Mrs. Train's face, and she laid a fluttering hand upon her husband's arm.

Mrs. Derricks met them at the door.

"Just come in and step on through to the parlor," said she, determined that the guests should at least not be put to the shame of being seated in the sitting room. "Abie is out on the front porch, but Mr. Hathaway will carry his chair in."

"No—wait—wait a moment," faltered Mrs.

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Train. "I'd rather you wouldn't carry him in. I—I'd rather see him on the porch—alone."

The ready tears slipped into Mrs. Derricks's eyes. There was a painful pause; then Mrs. Train gave her husband a swift glance and withdrew her hand from his arm.

"Not even I?" he asked gently.

"Not even you, Aleck!" she murmured.

She left the three standing in silence, and passed with a slow but steady tread around the corner of the house.

Abe, lying back among his pillows, with his thin hands folded upon his narrow little lap, was gazing fixedly at a cloud which lay like a glistening strand in the azure sea beyond the remotest Kentucky hills. His dampened and smoothly brushed hair, fresh from Mrs. Derricks's capable hands, added somehow to the saintliness, the other-worldliness of expression which the pallor and emaciation of sickness impart to the plainest of faces.

All unconscious of the onlooker who had noiselessly stolen up to the end of the porch, he smiled to himself, after a moment, and murmured aloud, slowly and crooningly: "I—see

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— angels — with — white — wings — and — streets — that — shine — like — silver — and — gold!” Then, startled by a footfall that could no longer restrain itself, he turned his head.

The mother stepped toward her child—her first, her only child—from whose face her eyes had been withheld for nine long years. She tried to remember that he did not yet know she was his mother, and that he must not yet know. She tried to speak, to summon the veriest commonplace of conversation. She tried to remember her resolution and her promises to her husband to be calm. But all she could do was to kneel at the child's side as at a shrine, inclose him tightly within her arms, and weep aloud.

Abe did not flinch from the unexpected assault, or struggle to escape. He sat perfectly still, without moving so much as a finger; and when Mrs. Train finally lifted her wet face she found herself looking into a pair of serious gray eyes—her own eyes, her baby's eyes, but eyes before which she strangely quailed.

“Are you Dr. Train's wife?” he asked soberly.

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"Yes, dear."

"Are you cryin' that way because you're sorry I'm sick?"

"Yes, dear—and because you remind me so much of a little boy I once lost."

"A boy just like me?" asked Abe with interest.

"Yes—only smaller then."

"And crooked, too?"

"Yes," brokenly. "At first he was straight—oh, so beautiful and straight. Then a terrible accident befell him, and from that time on he was crooked."

He smiled—the case was exactly like his own; but she, with a convulsive, irrepressible throe of mother love long denied buried her head in his breast once more.

"And did you love him as much after he was crooked?" he asked eagerly, when he could again look into the clear depths of her eyes.

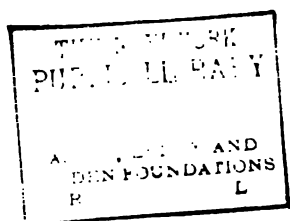
"More—more—oh, so much more!"

Again he smiled in his seraphic way. This testimony as to woman's superiority to crookedness was something of which he never tired.

"What kind of an accident was it?"



“‘A boy just like me?’ asked Abe.”



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"He—he was blown up on a steamboat," she ventured shiveringly.

Abe stiffened and half leaped from his chair.

"Why, Mrs. Train, I was blowed up on a steamboat, too!" he cried in amazement.

"Yes—Dr. Train told me." Her pulse was throbbing, and her breath fluttered uncertainly as she neared the crucial point. But she still smiled.

"If you lost your little boy, and I lost my father and mother, we both know how each other feels, don't we?"

"Oh, yes, I'm sure we do."

"But you got your little boy back?"

"Yes, after a long time."

"I didn't git my father and mother back," he observed pensively.

The sensation in her breast was becoming painful and she could not speak. So he went on:

"If you hadn't got him back, and knowed he was crooked, but didn't care for that, meb-be I could have been your little boy, and you and Dr. Train could have been my father and mother. Would you?" he added doubtfully.



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In spite of her rising excitement Mrs. Train paused before it was too late, recalling her husband's final caution not to reveal her identity yet. But the boy's talk had unexpectedly smoothed the way, and with masterly genius she put the instinct of her mother love before her husband's professional knowledge.

"Yes, yes, darling. Maybe it isn't too late yet. It was only the other day—only yesterday, indeed, that we got him back. In fact, we haven't got him yet. We only know where he is."

To the quick-witted child her tone told more than her words. He suddenly stiffened in her embrace, and flung up his head like a frightened antelope.

"Do you mean that I—that I——" His husky, whispering voice dared go no further.

"Yes, my darling, I mean that you are our little boy!" she whispered back quiveringly, and inclosed him within her arms suddenly, almost fiercely, lest some evil genie should again snatch him from her breast.

The child's emotion was far, far too deep for expression. No cry, kiss, or sob would answer for him. He simply lay motionless in

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his mother's arms, with wide, wondering, unseeing eyes, until she, half in fear, was constrained to relax her hold and peep into his face. Then his pinched little features began to twitch.

“O mother, mother!” he cried; “I wish Watch could be here to see you and my father!”

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### XVI

IN Little Boyland, to whose imaginative inhabitants a blackberry thicket is a fearsome jungle, the village church an imposing cathedral, and the swimming-hole in the creek a respectable lake, a mile and a half is no mean distance. In none of his nutting or berrying excursions with the boys, therefore, had Abe wandered as far as Pilot House.

But once, when his grandfather had taken him on a load of wheat to a neighboring town, he had passed the tall iron gates of the estate and caught a glimpse, through trees and shrubs, of a graveled driveway, great white urns overflowing with vines, a fountain, and the galleried, many-windowed house beyond. He had asked his grandfather if a king lived there, and when the old man answered, "No, a steamboat captain," the lad was not disappointed. Between a king and a steamboat

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captain there was no great difference, one's dominion being on the land only, and the other on the water.

During the rest of the ride to Boone's Ferry, Abe was oblivious of the heat and dust. How could one think of heat with his mind's eye still roaming through those lush-green, shaded aisles? Or of dust with that soft-plashing fountain still sounding in his ears? And ever since then the enchanting picture had remained in his mind, growing sharper rather than dimmer as its colors were freshened from time to time by the brush of imagination, until finally he had moved it from the real world, where it was somebody else's, into a dream world where it was all his own. Hence, when the buggy which carried the reunited little family back from Hathaway's turned in at the iron gate of Pilot House, the boy, with a start of recognition, emitted a cry of amazement.

"Why, Dr. Train, you don't live *here*!"

"*We* live here—you and mother and I. And remember that I am not 'Dr. Train' any more but 'father.'"

"And can I play anywhere inside the iron fence, and go up on the balconies, and smell

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the flowers, and sail boats in the fountain?" asked Abe.

"Why not? It's yours and ours."

Abe feasted his eyes in silence as they passed slowly up the driveway. His parents, interchanging smiles, curiously watched the play of thought upon his face, and waited for him to speak.

"I wisht grandpa could be here," he said wistfully at last. "He likes nice things, too. Once he said he wisht we had a fountain in *our* yard. And once he signed a paper for a big gilded rooster to go on our barn, so you could tell which way the wind blowed, and paid five dollars to the man. But the man never come back, and grandpa said he'd shoot him if he ever saw him again. But I don't believe he would. Would you shoot a man for a thing like that, Dr. Train—*father*, I mean?"

"No. I might horsewhip him."

"I don't believe he'd do even that, Abe," observed Mrs. Train.

"Oh, I'd horsewhip him myself," declared Abe earnestly. "A man that would steal ought to be horsewhipped."

After dinner they took him up to a large,

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high-ceiled, airy chamber which could have contained four little rooms the size of his old one at his grandfather's. The bedstead was of shining brass; the carpet as thick and yielding as a mat of moss; and one or two massive pictures, the largest Abe had ever seen, hung on the walls.

"This is your room, my dear," said the mother.

"All of it?"

"All of it," she answered with a smile.

He was visibly impressed. But it was not until he chanced to look out of an east window, with a sill as broad as a bench, that he said anything.

"O mother, I can see the river from here!" he cried, and from that moment the other glories of the room were forgotten.

In the stable they showed him a spotted pony and a cart which were to be his. His eyes glistened at the prospect of handling such an equipage all by himself; but almost the first question he asked was: "Can I drive over to grandpa's every day with it?"

Thus always did the wonders of his new home—to which no one could have been more

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keenly alive than he—become secondary or subservient to the affections or associations of his humble past. And though Mrs. Train looked a little rueful at first, and wondered if indeed she had got her boy back, neither she nor the doctor would have had it otherwise, as each confessed to the other in their pillow talk on that first night of their child's home-coming.

The very next day Abe, clad in a sailor suit with white anchors on his collar and cuffs, drove over to Hathaway's alone; and it was a decidedly proud little boy which stepped down from the red cart and tied his spotted pony to the barnyard fence. But he did not tarry long, for he had some of his father's letters to mail; and he would have been more than human had he walked instead of ridden to the village, though the short footpath would have put him there quicker than the round-about wagon road.

After posting his letters, he braced himself for the ordeal of running the gantlet of gaping spectators along Main Street, and drove to the *Argus* office. Fletcher came out to the curb.

"Holy smoke, Abe!" exclaimed the editor,

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with mock surprise. "Aren't you cutting a pretty wide swath with that gigabus and those clothes?"

Abe grinned. "I suppose you heard I've found my father and mother."

"Oh, yes. If you read the *Argus*, as every good citizen should, next to his Bible, you would have seen a column account last week of the event."

"Did you?" exclaimed Abe, highly elated. "But not my picture?"

"Yes, your picture, too. I sent over to the *Enterprise* for the cut. And I sent a marked copy to Miss Harrow."

"I'm much obliged, Mr. Fletcher. What do you suppose she'll think?"

"She'll be very, very happy."

"I want her to come and see my mother some time. And my mother wants to see the young lady I got a piano for."

He invited Fletcher to ride, and the latter climbed in. Across the street, barefooted Red Maginnis, lost in admiration and envy of the pony and cart, stood unnoticed by Abe in the excitement of asking a grown man to ride with him.



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"Mamma's boy!" shouted Red bitterly at this slight.

Abe brought the pony to a sudden halt.

"Red, don't you know me better than that?" he asked indignantly. "I didn't see you. I want you to ride, too."

Red, as quick to forgive as to take offense, hopped nimbly in, and the pony trotted off at a brisk rate.

Abe passed the Methodist parsonage intentionally two or three times; but to his disappointment neither of the Barneses was in sight. So after dropping his two passengers, he headed for the parsonage again. But first he looked at the watch which his father had given him that morning with the admonition; "Now, Abe, this keeps good time, and you must do things on good time, like a man." To his amazement it was already half-past four, and as his father had charged him to be back by five, he regretfully postponed his visit until another day.

Along in November, after the beautiful Indian summer was over and the winter rains had set in, with flurries of snow between, the

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Trains decided to go to New Orleans. As they would not return before spring, and possibly not then—their hearts were turning toward the old home in the East, where their boy had been born—they conceived it would be a fitting thing to give a farewell reception for Abe. Hathaway's, for a number of reasons, was chosen as the more suitable and appropriate place for such a function.

No individual invitations were issued; the whole village was invited, through the columns of the *Argus*, and nearly the whole village came. Every boy was present, creaking about in shoes to which his bare summer feet were hardly yet broken, and awkward and uneasy in the unwonted finery of a stiff collar, with his hair brushed preternaturally smooth and his hands washed preternaturally clean.

Mrs. Maginnis was there in a red silk which but too obviously dated back to a slenderer period in the history of her physique; and her waist, when she paddled across the room, tugged at the buttons across her robust breast as an uneasy ship tugs at its moorings. The wharf master, an old bachelor, was there, in a funereal coat which allowed only his finger

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tips to show, and rendered cuffs an unseen superfluity. Old man Brownlee, the post-master, was there, with an inconspicuous quid tucked neatly away in his left cheek, which he occasionally turned, as a hen does an egg, but so cautiously that none but the sharpest-eyed detected it. Mrs. Train was one of these, however, and the discovery threatened her gravity so frequently and obviously that her husband begged to be enlightened and allowed to share the fun. But she only teasingly shook her head.

Abe wore a dark-blue suit, spotless waist and cuffs, and a Windsor tie to match his suit. The change in him was not entirely in the imagination of his envious boy friends. His hair, parted in the middle instead of just above the ear, was not only glossier and healthier, but it was trimmed in a different manner, and gave his head a different shape. His complexion was lighter, his skin softer, and his hands neater.

It was a superficial change, of course. Yet something which had lain sleeping in him—the inheritance from generations of gentle forefathers — was beginning already to

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awaken. The atmosphere of Pilot House was already at work, like a leaven. The daily and hourly association with his father and mother was becoming manifest. Hence those little boys of Angel's Landing, who now held aloof from their former playmate with a kind of timidity, were instinctively right. That Abe who had "kept store" in his grandfather's big barn, and gathered old iron, and sold eggs, seemed to these boys a figure of the past which they would never see again. It was true. In the inevitable mutations of life, they never would know that Abe again.

They may not have felt it, but there was something sad about it, too, even though it was a better and a happier Abe they would know. Sad, perhaps, because they would never know this better and happier Abe as well as they had known the old Abe. That intimacy, in the course of events, would now be reserved for other boys, in another part of the world.

"Abe," said Fletcher about half-past eight o'clock, "there's a friend of yours outside who seems a little timid about coming in. Better go out."

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He opened the door for the boy, but remained inside himself. When he turned about he detected a peculiar, uneasy expression on Mrs. Train's face; but it was a moment before he realized that she was fearful lest her son be again spirited away in the night. He crossed the room to reassure her.

Abe, outside in the darkness, did not at first recognize the tall figure on the porch. Then he joyously sprang forward, dropping one of his crutches in his haste.

"O Miss Harrow!" he cried.

She swung him up to her lips with her strong arms and kissed him repeatedly.

"Did you come to see my father and mother?"

"No, indeed! I came to see you."

"But don't you want to see my father and mother?" he asked.

"Indeed, yes. But I want to see you more. That's why I had Mr. Fletcher send you out."

"He said you were afraid to come in!" laughed the boy.

"But you know better—now!"

"Yessum—yes, ma'am, I mean. But when I heard you wasn't goin' to teach school here

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any more, I was afraid I'd never see you again."

"And *I* was afraid when I heard that you had found your father and mother that I'd never see *you* again."

Later in the evening, when she had Fletcher alone for a moment, she said:

"Until to-night I have been really distressed over the effect our marriage might have on Abe. But I clearly perceive that a change has taken place. He is absorbed, body and soul, in his mother."

"Well, do you want two men?" asked Fletcher, with a twinkle.

"No, but I'm jealous—I might as well confess it." She looked at him soberly. "It *does* hurt me, dear."

"I believe you. But you have this consolation, no one but his mother could have taken him from you; and not even she, I am inclined to think, unless she had been a very superior woman."

"Let's say it was her motherhood, not her superiority."

"All right—if that suits you better. And on second thought, I think you're right."

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"But he did love me so truly, so splendidly!" she sighed.

"And does yet. Only mother comes first, as she should with *little* boys," he added, with a glance which brought a glow to her cheek.

Dr. and Mrs. Train, Abe, the Barneses, Fletcher, and a few other friends, were waiting on the wharf for a down-river boat. Seated on a pile of rope, in a dark corner, where no one saw him, was Red Maginnis also, who had played hookey in order to see Abe off.

In the midst of the talk a long, reverberating blast from a steamboat came rolling musically down the river from the bend above.

"Why, father, that's the *St. Lawrence!*" cried Abe.

"Yes."

"She'll never stop, father!" declared Abe.

"Haven't you ever known her to stop here?" asked Train, with a smile.

"Yes, sir, but with a broken pitman."

"Well, she'll stop this time, though she hasn't a broken pitman. Captain Rhodes tele-

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graphed me that she would. Can you guess the reason he gave?"

Abe shook his head.

"Because a little boy named Abe was to be one of the passengers."

It was true, though Abe could scarcely believe it. So once more, as on that spring day six months before, when Abe was conning his spelling lesson at the schoolhouse window, the great boat swung in a foaming curve for the shore. Good-bys were hastily said, farewell kisses exchanged. The great boat loomed mountain high beside the wharf; Captain Rhodes, smiling cheerily, extended a helping hand; roustabouts flew to the fenders; bells jangled in the engine room; and before Abe had reached the hurricane deck the *St. Lawrence* was backing out into midstream again.

Then, and not till then, did a diminutive figure appear on the edge of the wharf, and waving a rusty hat call out: "Good-by, Abe!"

"Good-by, Red!" called Abe, but with a sudden huskiness that made his voice almost inaudible to Red.

He stood at the rear of the vessel until tears and distance had blurred Angel's Landing.



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The last thing he distinctly saw was the little white schoolhouse glistening in the sun. But a strange teacher, not Miss Harrow, was standing at the desk; the little room at his grandfather's was no longer his; and——overwhelmed with a sense of irreparable loss and the sadness of irrevocable change, such as at times smites every finely attuned soul, he began to sob.

His mother had followed him unawares, and a moment later his head was upon her breast. After a little he sat up. His growing-pain—the growing-pain of the soul—was easier for the moment; and this time he looked ahead, not back, as every brave boy should.

“Will we go clear, clear to the end of the river, mother?” he asked in a subdued voice.

“Clear to the end. Are you glad?”

“Yes. But I'm gladder 'cause you and father are with me.”

(1)

THE END

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